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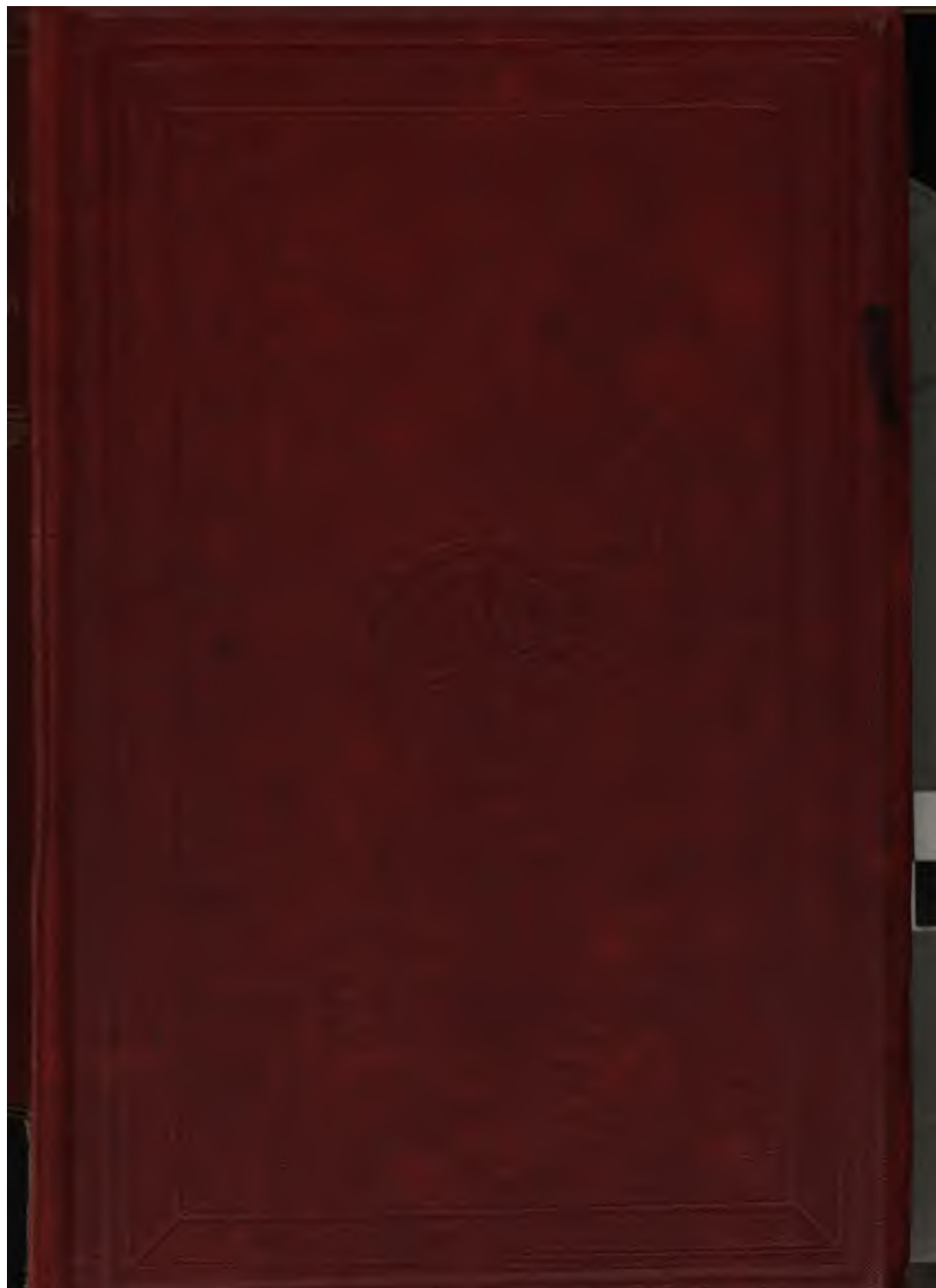
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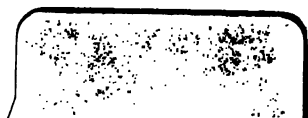
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JOHNNY ROBINSON.

VOL. I.

JOHNNY ROBINSON:

THE STORY OF
THE CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOLDAYS OF AN
"INTELLIGENT ARTISAN."

BY

'THE JOURNEYMAN ENGINEER,'
AUTHOR OF "SOME HABITS AND CUSTOMS OF THE WORKING CLASSES."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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TO

THOSE OF MY SCHOOLMATES

WHOM THE CHANCES AND CHANGES OF LIFE HAVE LEFT TO
ME AS THE FRIENDS OF MY MANHOOD,

This Work is Affectionately Dedicated,

IN MEMORY OF THE HAPPY DAYS

"WHEN WE WERE BOYS TOGETHER."

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JOHNNY ROBINSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE ROBINSONS.

O far as my reading showeth, it would appear to be an implied canon of autobiographic composition, that one or more chapters of each work should be devoted to the family history of its subject; and as our family go upon the principle that it is better to be out of the world than out of the fashion, I consider that I owe it to them to do my best to comply with the rule. Though, as we are a very commonplace family—commonplaceness, in fact, being our distinguishing characteristic—little can be said under this head

that is likely to interest that, in these cases, much-to-be-considered individual, the general reader. In the present instance, therefore, the greatest merit of the regulation chapter will be to make it as brief as is consistent with what is due to the family honour.

Ours, then, is a branch of the numerous and proverbially well-known Robinson family, who are generally spoken of in conjunction with the equally numerous, well known, and proverbial, Brown and Jones families. Sometimes when a Robinson who has commenced life at the foot of the commercial ladder has worked himself up to the position of a millionaire, and is going in for the landed gentry business, he will so far interest himself in the historic features of the family as to purchase a gallery of ancestors from the picture dealers, or order a coat of arms from the Heralds' Office ; but that I, a Robinson, low in the scale of wealth, and with my landed interests likely to be limited to a small investment in some cemetery, should take an interest in the

family genealogy, is, I must confess, an exceptional circumstance. What first induced me to take such an interest I cannot now remember. Perhaps it was in the hope of discovering "something to my advantage," or it may simply have been curiosity. Some of my acquaintances kindly suggest that it was "low pride;" but that could scarcely have been the case, for I must say that, like these acquaintances, I have never been able to discover anything (genealogically speaking) to be proud of in connexion with the family. No Robinson, so far as I have been able to ascertain, ever took a leading part in the fighting and marauding by which names and fortunes were so often made, and great families founded in the old historic time. To no baron bold or gallant knight can the Robinsons lay claim as an ancestor; to no old legend or castle can they point as pertaining to their name; and upon the whole, there can be little doubt that in the olden as in modern times they were of "the common people."

Notwithstanding this failure to discover anything in connexion with the history of my ancestors that would justify a little family pride on the grounds usually relied upon by people of "good family," I have always had a great, I may even say a morbid, desire to learn all that I possibly could respecting the origin of the Robinsons. But that "all," despite my indefatigable researches, has been very little, and of a very vague character, as it only enables me to arrive at the unsatisfactory, even if indisputable, conclusion that the family *must have been founded by somebody*. In its progress to its present position in the civilized community, it has doubtless seen many ups and downs in the world, and been of a variety of nations; and much of its very early history is necessarily buried in obscurity. As there is no evidence, either internal, external, or traditional, to fix the date of their first settlement in Great Britain, that date must always remain an exceedingly problematical, if not a purely imaginative matter.

If I were to assert that there were Robinsons among those "Painted knights of savage chivalry" who inhabited Britain prior to the Roman invasion, and that their favourite colours were red and blue, with the addition of a yellow belt on Sundays, the garter king at arms and the whole Herald's College to boot could not *prove* that it was not the case. It is possible that they came over—among the "rank and file," of course—to Britain with the Conqueror; though, to judge from the positions in life of the majority of their descendants, it is much more probable that they were some of those Saxon thralls whom the Conqueror and his might-is-right followers found already located upon their arrival in the country which they so unceremoniously appropriated to themselves. For aught any Robinson of modern days knows to the contrary, his ancestors during the Saxon period may, like the thrall of Cedric the Saxon, have been swineherds, and have worn brass collars with the names of their respective owners engraven thereon soldered round their

necks; or they may have been among the followers of "bold Robin Hood," and have aided that ballad-famed outlaw to steal the king's deer, and to rob and place in bodily fear the Norman dignitaries of the Church.

A study of the characteristics of the family induces the belief that numbers of them would have been found upon both sides in the civil wars between Charles I. and his Parliament; for though they are a loyal and patriotic family, there are many moderate and some red-hot Republicans among them; the latter talking loudly of freedom and equal rights, and never missing any opportunity of launching wholesale denunciations at the heads of the "bloated," "useless," or "bloodsucking" aristocracy. It is true that some of the members of this bloated body are philanthropists, and do all that single men may do to benefit their race, while others among them devote the best part of long and laborious lives to the service of their country, and materially assist in maintaining it in the

proud position among nations to which it has attained ; but then they are " aristocrats," and consequently obnoxious to ultra-Republican Robinsons, whose political opinions and notions concerning the aristocracy are formed by the weekly letters of " Bread or Blood " in Crusher's newspaper.

But though the parts which the Robinsons have or have not taken in the events which have now become historical can only be guessed at, it is quite certain that at the present day they are an exceedingly numerous and widely diversified family, embracing men of every shade of political opinion, and of every denomination of religion. There are Robinsons of all degrees of wealth, from the " merchant prince " to snobbish and despicable Robinson, who strives to " keep up appearances," and live " genteelly " upon 150*l.* per annum, turns insolvent when pressed for payment of his tradesmen's bills, and over-works and half starves miserable little slaveys, and defrauds unfortunate washerwomen, because his

wife, who has been "a genteel young person" in a fancy repository, and who, in her silly, penny-serial style, affects the fine lady, is in a great measure unable, and altogether unwilling, to do what she would call "anything menial." And there are Robinsons of all degrees of poverty, from the petty tradesman or working mechanic who is constantly struggling to bring his family up honestly, despite of adverse circumstances and limited means, to the Robinson whose decease is recorded in the newspapers under the heading of "Death from Starvation," and who (alas! that such sad tales should be "ower true") has died in the street on a dreary winter's night after having been refused admission to the casual ward of a workhouse. Very few either good or bad transactions are now completed without some member of the Robinson family being connected with them. — Robinson, Esquire, is chairman, director, or promoter of all sorts of real and sham public companies, and is connected with the making of

railways and the working of mines. He is the senior partner in banks, the "Co." in extensive firms, and the proprietor of patent medicines and washing machines; he speaks at public meetings, "ventilates" grievances in the newspapers, originates "movements," gets up agitations, and calls his local M.P. to book for his votes. And Robinsons are connected with fraudulent bankruptcies and "gigantic" swindles, are occasionally advertised for under the head of "Absconded," and sometimes sent into penal servitude, and some of them have even been hanged. But while, on the one hand, the proudest Robinson must confess that the family is essentially a plebeian one, the noblest-blooded Fitz-Anything must admit that it is a tolerably important one; and all things considered, the Robinsons are, to a certain extent, justified in considering themselves "no small beer."

Having spoken thus far of the Robinsons in general, I will now refer to that branch of them of which I have the honour of being a member in

particular. I have already said that the Robinsons have doubtless seen many ups and downs in the world, and it is during the period of one of their downs that I come upon the earliest reliable information I have been able to obtain concerning the branch of them to which I belong, as they were at that time (1740) agricultural labourers in one of the northern counties of England. This occupation, sons succeeding fathers, they continued to follow through several generations, leading the lives of exemplary peasants, and bringing up numerous families (God and agricultural labourers only know how) on an income of from eight to ten shillings per week. True to the custom of his family, my father at the age of eight years commenced agricultural pursuits in the compound capacity of crow-scarer and sheep-tender. When he had followed these occupations between four and five years, his parents began to consider that it was time for him to be put to some more remunerative and laborious employment. Cow-

boy, assistant waggoner, and several other of the most decidedly practical occupations connected with farm work were proposed, but as he had always evinced a strong predilection for mechanical pursuits and had frequently given proofs—in the shape of divers rat-traps and bird-cages made upon new and improved principles of his own invention—of his skill in them, he was, at his own earnest entreaty, backed by these specimens of his mechanical ingenuity, taken into the workshop of the village blacksmith. Here his work and conduct were of so satisfactory a character that at the end of a year the blacksmith was induced to take him as an apprentice without the customary premium, which his parents would never have been able to pay. During the “seven long years” of his apprenticeship he was fully initiated into the mysteries of horse-shoeing, plough-repairing, and all other kinds of work incidental to a village “smithy;” and so proficient did he become in these arts, that when at the expiration of his “time” he

spoke of leaving, his master, to induce him to stay, offered to take him into the business as a partner. But the young villager had a blacksmith's soul considerably above horse-shoeing, and so, notwithstanding the brilliant offer of his master, he determined to travel, for the two-fold purpose of improving his fortune and his abilities as a workman.

When this resolution became known it created the utmost surprise among the villagers, for this was in the "good old times" when railways were unknown, and when the travels of an inhabitant of a country village rarely extended further than an excursion to the neighbouring market town. The fact of any young man leaving the village would have been a matter of surprise among its primitive inhabitants, who prided themselves upon being born, living, and dying—if particularly fortunate without having troubled the parochial authorities—in their own parish. Indeed, the feudal system could scarcely be said to be extinct among them, for

the estate of which the village formed a part had been in the possession of the same family—of whose importance the villagers had very exalted ideas—for centuries; while many of the small, ill-built, unventilated hovels called cottages that were inhabited by the labourers and their families had regularly descended from father to son for many generations. The veneration and awe with which “the family” were regarded were such as would have given satisfaction to the most exacting baron of any age. Even “Sandy Bill,” who was the greatest drunkard, poacher, and bully in the village, would as soon have thought of voluntarily paying a midnight visit to the old mill, which was popularly believed to be used as a “night house” by disembodied spirits, as of disobeying, or even questioning, a command, however absurd, of any member of the family at “the hall.” The surprise that under ordinary circumstances would have been excited by the announcement that he intended to leave the village, was in my father’s case heightened,

and in many instances combined with indignation, owing to the fact that he was looked upon as a young man whose fortune was already made; for in the opinion of the villagers, to be a part proprietor of the "smithy" was to be a person of very considerable importance, and a position to which few men of my father's humble birth could attain. Old and young gathered round him to remonstrate with him on the folly, ingratitude, and wickedness of his conduct. Never within the memory of "the oldest inhabitant"—a man about ninety years of age, whose chief boast was that he had never slept a night out of the village—had such a thing occurred before. The only two young men who had left the village during his time had done so under compulsion, one of them having been transported beyond the seas for being connected with a case of sheep-stealing, while the other had fallen a prey to the wiles of a recruiting sergeant, and had been killed in "the wars."

But remonstrance and entreaty alike failed to

shake the resolution of the young blacksmith, and it was then agreed upon all hands that he was a shameless desperado of whom no good could possibly come, and who would ultimately be hanged for emulating some of the deeds of Dick Turpin or Captain Kidd. Notwithstanding these prognostications of evil he adhered firmly to his determination, and so one bright summer's morning he bid "a long farewell" to his native village, and with a bundle containing his wardrobe under his arm, and a few pounds that he had managed to save in his pocket, he set out upon the tramp. Of his adventures, if he had any, while on the tramp I can say nothing, as I have never heard them spoken of, but I know that for about three years he was "knocking about the country," working sometimes in one town and sometimes in another, and finally settled down in the large and populous seaport town of Dockington, where he was engaged in the workshops of an engineering firm, who employed about two thousand work-

men of all kinds. In this town he first became acquainted with my mother, who was "the maid of the inn" at which the blacksmiths of Dockington principally congregated. Of the story of their loves I am not in a position to speak, but as they were a very practical and matter-of-fact kind of couple, it would probably not be at all an interesting one even if I could tell it.

I have now, so far as I am acquainted with it, given the history, both general and special, of our family, and though it may not be a particularly entertaining one, it has at least the advantage of being reliable, and is such a one as I think justly entitles me to say that, like many persons of much greater importance and worth than I can ever hope to be, I come of "poor but honest parents."

CHAPTER II.

DOMESTIC MANAGEMENT—MY BIRTH, CHRISTENING, AND CHRISTENING “DO.”

DOMESTIC economy, like a low, soft voice, is a sweet thing in woman, and a practical knowledge of, and a capability of applying it, is one of their most valuable qualities; though as it is merely a useful art, and does not rank as an accomplishment, it is of course, in the present age, one of the least studied branches of woman's work. Important to all classes of society, it is specially important among the working-classes, with whom the knowledge, or want of knowledge of the art, upon the part of a wife and mother, makes all the difference between a comfortable and a wretched home. Among these latter classes, the practice

of domestic economy is in a greater or lesser degree compulsory, and a practical acquaintance with it will be found among them in a larger proportion than in any other class ; though even among these classes a profitable proficiency in this most necessary art is by no means so universal as could be desired. In the working-classes, as in all other grades of society, there are women who seem to lack all natural aptitude for domestic management—women who, like pretty, loveable Dora, in “David Copperfield,” are willing to manage, and really believe they are managing, but who, like her, only meddle and muddle. And there are others, who previous to their marriage have been following pursuits that render them in a great measure incapable of efficiently discharging the domestic duties that of necessity fall to the lot of married women in their rank of life.

To get as a wife one of these mismanaging women is one of the greatest of the many evils that may fall to the lot of a working-man. She

may be beautiful, or possessed of "a bit of money," or "have a trade in her fingers," whereby she can add a trifle to the family income, or she may even be "accomplished," or have other desirable qualifications; but if she be a bad manager, then woe be to her husband. To him will life become a mere accumulation of small miseries. He may bid farewell not only to "the tranquil mind," but likewise to the comfortable home, the timely and well-prepared meal, and the pleasant evenings by his own fireside. To him will the "makeshift" dinner and buttonless shirts become as familiar as household words, and to him will washing and scouring days have unusual and additional horrors, while yielding him but a small share of their compensatory advantages of cleanliness of raiment and household. On him will debt and the tally-man descend, as on their legitimate prey, and poverty will mark him for its own. To his lot will it come to see his children running about dirty and draggled; to know

that they and himself are regarded as objects of pity by the more fortunately situated of his own class, and to feel that in his partner he has got not a helpmate but a clog that is dragging him down to want and squalor. For him will the public-house, with its cozy rooms, bright fire, and boon companions, have its most dangerous attraction ; and finally perhaps upon him, in the last stages of his degeneration, will magistrates be called to pass sentences of "imprisonment with hard labour," for "wife beating." Where there is so little to manage upon the consequences of bad management are most dire, and it is fortunate for the working-classes that the absolutely bad domestic managers among them are comparatively rare, and that though there are degrees of excellence among the better managers, a large majority of female heads of working-class households are fairly entitled to be classed in the category of "rare good managers," and regarded as the brightest ornaments of their unquestionably humble, but nevertheless, owing to

their industry and economy, as unquestionably happy and comfortable homes; and to this section, fortunately for her husband and children, my mother belonged.

It is only those who, like the present writer, have personally experienced the effects of good, and witnessed the disastrous results of bad management among the poorer classes of society, who can fully appreciate how much those classes owe to domestic management. Like many others in the working-class ranks of life, my parents married much sooner than cautious people would have deemed prudent, for at the time of their marriage they had neither money (except what was due to my father as wages), house, nor furniture, and commenced their matrimonial life in furnished lodgings. Their apartments consisted of a small and very dark underground kitchen, and an upper room of an undecided character, which, as a closet would have been tolerably large, but having to be used by them as a sleeping apartment, was most inconveniently

and unhealthily small ; the only redeeming feature in connexion with it being that it was almost impossible for anyone sleeping in it to fall out of bed, owing to there being but a few inches of space on any side between the bed and the wall.

There are persons who will tell you that no man has any right to marry upon less than £300 a-year, and who regard the idea of "love in a cottage" as a romantic absurdity, and perhaps the opinion of these matrimonial economists is quite correct. If they are, my father's must then have been one of those exceptional instances that are said to prove the rule, as his was a case not merely of love in a cottage, but of love in the two worst rooms of a very inferior cottage. For though not a gushing or romantic, my parents were a loving, aye ! and a happy couple too, such a couple as many who have commenced their married life with an expensive "establishment" and an ample income—the obtaining of which was their chief inducement to marriage—and continued and ended it in

"splendid misery," might have envied, although at the time of his marriage my father's income was considerably less than £100 a year.

To my father, as to most newly married men, the marvellous results of domestic management were incomprehensible. He could not understand how it was that the income which, in his hands, had scarcely sufficed to support himself, should, in the hands of his wife, be found sufficient to keep them both, and that, too, in a much more comfortable manner than it had kept him previous to his marriage; for as a Benedick he had many little comforts and delicacies to which in his bachelor days he had been a stranger. His "working clothes," in the fastening of which with small pieces of string and wire he had often had to exercise all the mechanical ingenuity of which he was possessed, had now always got their full complement of buttons. The holes in them, which were generally caused by sparks from the fire, though originally less than a six-

pence in size, had, from lack of the proverbial stitch in time, formerly been wont to extend themselves into ghastly rents. Now they were either darned or neatly patched upon their first appearance, and were washed and changed with much greater regularity and frequency than had been the case in his bachelor days. In the days of his lodgerhood he was "always getting in the road" of his landlady, and when by any rare chance he had spent an evening at home—if a lodging in which you are told that you are always getting in the road can be called a home—he had been frowned at by the good dames who had come to gossip and talk about their neighbours with the widow Jones. But now he was never in the way, or, at least, he was never told so, and his evenings were generally spent at home, in the company of his wife, whose bright smile and cheery manner made their little kitchen appear a very bower of bliss. In almost every incident of his daily life; in the meals set upon the table with a regularity equal

to that of the workshop bell ; in the elaborately "got up" Sunday shirt and in the well brushed and carefully put away Sunday suit ; in the pair of warm slippers, the plate of hot toast, and the nicely broiled bloater or bit of steak that awaited him on his return from work on winter evenings ; and in a host of other trifling but comforting attentions, that in the days of his single blessedness he had never received, he felt and acknowledged the physically and morally beneficial influences of domestic management.

Domestic management, though certainly not a fine art, must, when the extent and importance of its social influences and effects are duly considered, be admitted to be a great and useful one—greater, perhaps, than the more pretentious, much talked of, and little understood science of political economy. Does any one suppose, for instance, that the greatest political economist of the age could provide all the necessary comforts for a family consisting, we will say, of a man and wife and three children,

and have a "surplus" left to deposit in the Post Office Savings Bank, out of an income of thirty shillings per week? Is there not a probability, amounting almost to certainty, that in this case the "financial statement" of the political economist would at the end of the week show a considerable deficiency in his exchequer? And yet this is a feat that is successfully performed every week by thousands of working men's wives, and is regarded as a comparatively easy achievement in domestic economy by the working class graduated in that science.

By the exercise of this art my mother, though a dowerless bride, soon demonstrated to her husband that she was—in the sense of a penny saved being a penny gained—a fortune in herself; for before they had been married quite a year she had, by judicious management and strict economy in domestic matters, been able to save enough money to furnish a small house of their own with. This saving, it is true, was effected under very favourable circumstances, as

during the first year of their marriage they had only themselves to provide for; and as each of them had at the time of their marriage a tolerably well supplied wardrobe, they had incurred very little expense in respect to clothing during that year; but still it was regarded as a great and wonderful achievement by my father, who was, consequently, very proud of it. The house was certainly a very small one, and the furniture of the most homely description, but then they were their own; and the feeling of dignity consequent upon proprietorship gave to every apartment in the house, and every article of furniture contained therein, a twofold charm and value. In after life I have heard my parents referring in very disparaging terms to that establishment, calling the house "a hole," and speaking of the furniture as "a few bits of sticks," but at the time of its formation they would have been highly indignant with any person who had expressed the smallest doubt of its being one of the best and completest homes ever

presided over by a working man and his wife.

In this, my parents' first house, I, their first-born, was about three o'clock one morning, in the month of March, 18—, ushered into the world. Although I was necessarily present on that to me important occasion, and was one of the most interested and interesting persons connected with it, I have, curiously enough, no recollection whatever concerning the event; and for the information which I possess relative to my birth, and to my career during the three or four years immediately succeeding it, I am indebted to my parents and others who knew me during that period of my existence.

I have never had the "future revealed" to me by any of those modern seers whose prophetic revelations are given under the powerful inspiration of thirty stamps and a stamped addressed envelope; nor have I ever had my nativity calculated or my horoscope cast, though I have often thought of having these things done in consideration of

there being a sort of astrocardological prediction connected with my birth, which happened in this wise :—During the first hours of the morning on which I was born, and the whole of the night preceding it, a great storm of rain and wind had been raging, the latter making a dreadful noise and doing considerable damage, of which the blowing down of the chimney of my father's house was a part. This state of things had put the members of the household—including for the time being a doctor and nurse—in a state of alarm, by which, had it lasted, I should probably have been a sufferer ; but about half an hour before I made my entrance on the stage of life the rain ceased, the wind was hushed with a surprising suddenness, and the moon, which up to that time had been totally obscured by masses of heavy watery clouds, shone out with great brilliancy. On these circumstances, afterwards strengthened by some corroborative testimony obtained by “ shuffling the cards,” a sort of local “ Meg Merrilies,” familiarly known

as "Old Peg," who combined the occupations of fortune-teller and nurse, and was my mother's attendant upon the interesting occasion of which I am speaking, founded a solemn prediction to the effect that the infant Robinson, at whose birth she was then assisting, would come to be a great and wealthy man, and a glory and ornament to his race. Of this prediction I should probably never have heard, but for my mother entertaining an apologetical belief in the truth of it.

"There is no saying what may happen," she would observe, when speaking upon this subject. "What is to be will be; and whatever people may say about fortune-tellers, I know they tell the truth sometimes, for one of them told me that I would marry a dark man, and so I have; and another of them told a fellow-servant of mine that some of her relations would die before the year was out, and in two months after she received a letter saying that her grandmother was dead. And if they tell the truth one time, why mayn't they tell it another?" she would

triumphantly ask, after adducing these instances of truthful and realized divination.

But the prediction, unluckily, alas! for the subject of it, proved to be as false as any of those which the sybil who had uttered it was daily in the habit of making to the servant-maids and other silly people who came to her to have their fortunes told, and even my mother's belief in it was at last destroyed owing to "Old Peg" professing to discover "the line of murder" in the hand of her (my mother's) sister.

By my mother I was considered to be in every respect a baby of the first degree of excellence, and when, by way of conferring a favour upon them, she showed me to her lady friends, they confirmed her in that opinion by assuring her that I was "the dearest little thing," "the sweetest little poppet," "the loveliest little fellow," and so forth, that they had ever seen; although it was the private opinion of some of these same lady friends—and more especially those

who had babies of their own—that I was “a nasty, ill-tempered little brute,” and wanted “a good shaking.” And many “a good shaking,” if I have been rightly informed, I received at the hands of divers small nurse-girls, char and washerwomen, and other stray domestics to whose charge my mother had occasionally to entrust me during the first two or three years of my infancy.

My first appearance in public was upon the occasion of my christening, which took place when I was about a month old. My parents, after due deliberation, agreed that I should be named John; they likewise agreed that, inasmuch as I was their first child, and, my mother added, such an extraordinary fine baby, they would have a “do” in celebration of the event, and it was arranged that the christening should take place on a Sunday, and the “do” on the following night. The baptismal ceremonial was duly performed with all requisite pomp and decorum; the young woman who had succeeded my mother

in the situation which previous to her marriage she had filled at "The Blacksmiths' Arms" acting as my godmother, while two of my father's "mates" officiated as my godfathers. My behaviour upon the occasion, I have my mother's authority for saying, was "most beautiful." "I was," she said, "as quiet as quiet could be, and never so much as whimpered even when the water was sprinkled on my face;" but this "beautiful" behaviour might to a certain extent be attributable to the fact that I was fast asleep during the whole of the time that the ceremony lasted. On leaving the church the christening party returned to my father's house, to which a few other friends had likewise been invited to take tea; and a splendid tea the guests, when they had partaken of it, unanimously declared it to be. I have often heard that tea spoken of, and always in the most eulogistic manner; and if that variety which is allowed to be charming can also be said to constitute splendour, the tea in question must certainly have

been a most magnificent one. Some persons' idea of a complete tea is to have tea with bread and butter, toast, tea-cakes, and bun-loaf, but a tea of this mild and insignificant description would be "a fool" to the one given by my parents upon the day of the christening of their son and heir. As my father truly observed, it was the first occasion upon which they had "come out" since their marriage, and he was determined that they should come out well; and I have been assured by those who had the good fortune to be present at this memorable feast, that he worthily carried out his determination. 'That tea,' as my godmother would frequently say when speaking of it, "was a tea, and no mistake. There was nothing paltry at that tea! No! she should rather think there was not." At that tea there was, in addition to the eatables already mentioned, an extensive assortment of confectionery, consisting of biscuits, pound-cakes, shortbread, about a dozen saucers of jams and jellies, and a number of sweetmeats the names

of which were unknown to or unpronounceable by the guests before whom they were placed. But the confectionery only formed the lighter portions of the meal; the more substantial part of it consisting of beefsteaks, mutton chops, pork-pies, sausages, and, "by special desire" of one of the party, red herrings. In addition to all these, a bottle of rum was likewise provided for the especial behoof of one of the gentlemen, who on that day "did promise and vow three things in my name," and who had strong and conscientious objections to drinking tea—slops he called it—unless it was spirituously flavoured. Having, by partaking heartily of it, and subsequently singing its praises, borne testimony in word and deed to the especial and superior excellence of the tea, the christening party took their leave, expressing themselves highly gratified with the entertainment which they had received, and promising to come without fail to the "do" which was to take place on the following evening.


Those who had been bidden to the "do" assembled with a commendable punctuality on the Monday evening. Cake and wine were handed to each of the guests upon their arrival, and cards and conversation served to fill up their time till supper was served.

After supper a number of toasts and healths were drank, including, among the latter, that of the young gentleman in whose honour the feast was held, and who had been sent to bed out of the way while the rejoicings of which he was the cause were in progress, and one of the guests then proposed that a fiddler should be sent for. This proposition was immediately acted upon, and "Rosin Dick," the chief violinist of most of the threepenny and sixpenny "hops" in the district, engaged; and with the aid of music, singing, and such dancing as the smallness of the room admitted of, the merry-making was kept up with great spirit till four o'clock the next

morning, at which hour the company departed; and so terminated my christening "do," which passed off to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

CHAPTER III.

A SWELL BABY—A NEW BROTHER—THE COURT WHERE
I WAS BORN.

Y christening being over, and the novelty of having a child of their own somewhat abated, my parents once more settled down into their ordinary quiet course of life, my mother bringing all the energies of her mind to bear upon the work of bringing me up in the way I should go.

With the single exception, perhaps, of ladies' maids, barmaids are allowed to be the smartest of all smart servants, but even when a barmaid my mother had never been a dressy person, and after her marriage her dress, although always neat and clean, was of the plainest kind. So plain was it, indeed, that it quite excited the indig-

nation of a number of the more showily dressed ladies in her own rank of life, who resented her simplicity of attire as a degradation to their order, and unanimously declared that they were quite ashamed to see a mechanic's wife, and a young woman, too, dressing in the common manner in which Mrs. Robinson did. But shame, like most other emotions, is to great extent a matter of taste, and depends in a great measure upon the feelings and opinions of the persons by whom it is experienced ; and so, while these ladies blushed lest the gentility of their class should be lowered in the estimation of the vulgar by the common dress of Mrs. Robinson, the latter would have felt very heartily ashamed to have taken her husband's Sunday clothes to the pawn-shop, or to have contracted a debt with the tallyman, without her husband's knowledge, as some of the ladies who professed to feel shame at her want of ambition in the matter of dress were frequently in the habit of doing. If, however, there was any lack of pride in my mother

with regard to her own dress, there was certainly none in connexion with her selection of my infant wardrobe. My hoods and cloaks, which were of the latest fashion and the loudest and most brilliant colours, were pronounced by all good judges in such matters to whom they were shown to be "splendatious." My long clothes, in addition to being made of the finest materials, were ornamented with "any quantity" of needlework and embroidery; and altogether, I am informed—although I was unfortunately unconscious of the pleasing fact at the time—I was a regular swell of a baby.

Nor did my swell baby days terminate with my long clothes. I have in my possession a portrait of myself, taken after I—or rather, my clothes—had been "shortened," and when I was at the "interesting age" of fourteen months, in which one of my short frocks is—and I make the statement advisedly—the principal feature, for while the frock and even the row of buttons with which it is adorned, are painted with the utmost


elaboration and attention to details, the countenance has evidently been considered as quite a minor if not an altogether useless accessory, and is much less naturally and skilfully treated than an orange which is held in the left hand of the subject. But it would be doing an injustice to the artist to find fault with him for having in this particular work of art left it doubtful as to whether the head of the portrait was intended to represent a threepenny loaf or a swede turnip, as there can be little doubt that the chief object of the work was to perpetuate—so far as the power of perpetuation existed in a twelve-and-sixpenny portrait—for the benefit of future generations of the Robinson family, the elegant design and splendid appearance of the frock, which was the most prominent feature of the picture. And if ever garment was worthy of being handed down to posterity through the painter's art it was certainly this one. It was a low-bodied frock, and left the neck and shoulders of its wearer almost as freely exposed as those of

a fashionable lady at the opera. It had very short sleeves, which were puffed, and both sleeves and neck were trimmed with white lace. It had a tight body, a short waist, and a wide skirt, which—in the portrait, at least—fell into graceful folds; but its chief excellence lay in the neatness and judicious combination of its colours. The colour of the frock itself was a deep red, while the trimmings consisted of two broad bands of bright yellow round the lower part of the skirt, a row of twelve large blue glass buttons down the front, and the white lace already mentioned round the sleeves and neck; and when the effect of this combination of tints is duly considered, it must be allowed by all unprejudiced persons that my mother was quite justified in asserting that it was a most attractive looking frock.

Thanks to a tolerably strong constitution, and the watchful care of my mother, whose chief ambition was to have it acknowledged, even by rival mothers, that I was in a physical as well as

in a dressy sense, a fine baby, I got through the earlier stages of my "teething" and a variety of the other ills that baby flesh is heir to in a most satisfactory manner, and in due time, and after undergoing the series of bumps and falls usually sustained by infants when learning to walk, I became able to toddle about by myself. But even then my mother seldom trusted me out of her sight, and I would doubtless have grown up to be one of those social nuisances, a spoilt child, or one of those most despicable of male creatures, a mother's pet, if an event had not occurred when I was about two years and a half old, which, although not very remarkable in itself, had a most important bearing upon my future position, inasmuch as it caused my mother to perceive—at least with regard to the somewhat extravagant and over careful attentions which she had been in the habit of bestowing upon me—a divided duty, the event in question being nothing less than an addition, in the shape of another son, to our family.

Of this event, notwithstanding my extreme youth at the time at which it took place, and that I have entirely forgotten other occurrences of a more important nature and a later date, I have a dreamy but still vividly accurate and distinct recollection, and were I an artist I could from memory paint the interior of our house, with its inhabitants and furniture, precisely as they appeared on the morning of my younger brother's birth. On that morning I had been left in my bed till a much later hour than usual, and when I was at last taken out of it, by an old woman whom I had noticed about the house for a day or two previously, instead of being immediately washed and dressed, as was usually the case, I was allowed to run about the house in my night-dress, and left entirely to my own devices. Availing myself of this state of uncontrolled freedom, I left the house and joined a number of other children, whom I found playing in an adjoining gutter, and having spent a pleasant half hour with these new-found companions, and



got my hands, face, and dress plentifully besmeared with dirt, I returned to the house. Finding the breakfast things still on the table, I laid siege to the sugar-basin, and after several unsuccessful attempts, in the course of which I broke a number of cups and saucers, and upset the coffee-pot, I at last succeeded in laying hold of it, and was comfortably seated on the floor, regaling myself with its contents, when the old woman who had taken me out of bed came down the stairs with what appeared to be a bundle of flannel in her arms. Having taken the sugar from me, and given vent to a great number of exclamations of horror and surprise, she opened the bundle which she held in her arms, and showed me an object within it which she informed me was the new brother that the doctor had brought from London in his pocket for me. This introduction to my new brother was attended with a circumstance which impressed me in anything but a favourable manner in his behalf. I had never heard of a brother

before, and upon looking into the bundle and finding that a brother was not anything to eat, I instantly concluded that it must be something to play with. Under this impression I laid hold of the object in the bundle somewhat roughly, and was instantly rewarded for doing so by a sound cuff on the ear, from the hand of the indignant nurse, who denounced me as a jealous-minded little wretch, and informed the very slovenly-looking maid, who was to assist her with the household work till such time as my mother should be able to again resume the reins of domestic government, that as soon as I saw the baby I seemed to know that my nose was out of joint, and had made a savage attempt to pull its arm out. In making this assertion, however, the nurse gave me credit for an amount of knowledge of which I was certainly not possessed, for I did not know that my nose was out of joint, and was at that time much too young to have the slightest conception of the meaning of that somewhat vulgar but still expressive phrase. But

though I did not *know*, and could not understand, that my nose was, metaphorically speaking, out of joint, I soon began to *feel* that such was the case, for the new brother now entirely monopolized the attention of all who came about the house, while I, who had hitherto reigned supreme, was left unnoticed. And when by kicking, screaming, and rolling about the floor, I succeeded in attracting attention to myself, the "notice" generally consisted in a threat to "give me something," or the carrying out of that threat, the promised "something" usually being a "good smacking;" or else I was "bundled out," and ordered to go and play with the other children in the court.

The court of which my father's house formed a part, was one of a number that branched off from a tolerably large, and at that time respectable front street. It was not a very large court, comprising, as it did, only twelve small houses, each of which consisted of four small apartments, and was let at a rental of three

shillings per week, the occupants being chiefly labouring men, of a class whose incomes were less than that of my father. But though the court and the houses in it were small, that fault did not extend to the families of those who lived in them, as they were upon a decidedly large scale, and there were few courts of the same, or indeed of a considerably larger, size that could have produced an equal number of children. A cabman who occupied No. 4 headed the list with ten, the eldest of whom was only fifteen years of age; there were two families with eight, and several with six children each; while in our family, which was the smallest in the court, there were now two children. Among the juvenile population of the court there was a number whose ages were between five and two years, and these children were generally sent out of doors to play; and so long as their games were carried on in the court all went well. It was very rarely, however, that their play was confined to the court for any

length of time, for with the true spirit of street children, they generally made for the open air, where they could indulge in the luxury of playing in the gutter, and otherwise amuse themselves in a more varied and unrestrained manner than they could do when cribbed, cabined, and confined within the limited space of our court, and subjected to the watchful glances of their parents. Now, my mother, much to the disgust of some of her neighbours, would never allow me to play, or in any other way associate with these children. When questioned concerning her motives for acting in this manner, she would say that she had noticed that, however clean and tidy such children were when they went out to play, they always returned from play with their clothes ready for the wash-tub; and moreover than that, some of them were in the habit of throwing stones and using "bad words." And so I was strictly forbidden, under penalty of receiving a beating in case of transgression, to "go near those naughty children."

In this state of comparative seclusion, and jealously guarded from all communication with the rougher urchins of the court, I had grown up a highly moral and respectable baby, and would perhaps have continued to have grown in grace as well as in years and stature, but for the birth of my brother, which event, by entirely withdrawing me from my mother's care for a time, and permanently engrossing a considerable portion of that care and attention which she had before bestowed exclusively upon me, was destined to effect a revolution in my "manners and customs," highly detrimental to my infantile morality and respectability. During my mother's illness, those who reigned in her stead, so far from following her example in forbidding me to associate with the other children in the court, actually ordered me, as I have already stated, to go and play with them. This order I at first obeyed somewhat reluctantly, for though I had of my own free will joined these children on the morning on which my brother was born, I had

merely done so in the exuberance of spirits which I felt at finding myself master of my own actions. In my cooler moments, owing to my mother's teaching, I entertained a great though vague and undefined fear of naughty children, whom I had been taught to regard as very dangerous persons. But being ordered to go out and play with, and finding myself neglected and unnoticed at home, I ventured in a timid manner to join in their play, and finding that they were very sociable, and not at all the terrible characters that my mother had represented them to be, and feeling delighted with their free and unconstrained mode of life, I soon became a fully initiated and confirmed companion of the gutter.

CHAPTER IV.

I CONTINUE TO DEGENERATE, AND BECOME OF THE STREETS, STREETY—WITH A VIEW TO MY REFORMATION WE CHANGE OUR RESIDENCE—OUR NEW LANDLADY—IT IS DETERMINED TO SEND ME TO SCHOOL.




HAVING thus found a means of passing my time with congenial companions, and in a manner exceedingly pleasant to myself, I soon ceased to “bother” those who had charge of me, and they in return never bothered me or themselves by attempting to interfere with my amusements. The result of this state of things was that when my mother became convalescent she made the, to her, horrible discovery that I had become a street child. My downfall she found was terrible and complete. Twice in the course of the first day of her being downstairs did I return from play with my clothes and my-

self ready for the wash-tub; on the following day she detected me in the act of throwing stones, and before a week had elapsed she had overheard me using "bad words" in the course of an altercation with a young gentleman of about the same age as myself, who resided in one of the neighbouring courts, and who had presumed to encroach upon a part of the gutter that by right of usage belonged exclusively to the children of our court. My mother was filled with consternation on making these painful discoveries, and at once set to work to try and bring about a better state of affairs by attempting to bring me back to my former state of juvenile respectability. But the attempt was a vain one, the respectable had, alas, fallen; and the fall had been of too utter and complete a character to admit of my being lightly reclaimed.

It was in vain that I was told that the beggars would take me away, or that a black man would come for me if I went with "those

naughty little boys and girls." In vain were bribes and threats resorted to for the purpose of inducing me to sever my connexion with my street companions. For that purpose, even the magic power of "toffee"—a power that to me had hitherto proved irresistible—was insufficient, and the rod—and in this case it was certainly not spared—powerless. In vain, too, were all endeavours to keep me in the house by force, for when detained indoors against my will I generally managed to incommode and otherwise so effectually to "bother" my mother while she was engaged in the performance of her household duties—now considerably increased by the late addition to her family—that she was glad to let me out, and when once free I was never long in joining my companions.

That I should have become a street child was, my mother considered, one of the greatest evils that could have befallen her or me; but bad as she thought this state of things, she was destined to find that worse was to come. In the first



stage of my degeneration I had simply joined in the games of the neighbouring children, and had always returned from play in company with them, and with no worse consequence to myself than perhaps a soiled or torn frock or pinafore. Had my decline stopped at this point my mother, notwithstanding the horror with which she at first regarded it, would most probably, owing to the force of habit and the distraction of domestic occupations, have become reconciled to it. But my backsliding propensities were unfortunately of too strong a nature to allow me to stop at so comparatively safe a point in my downward career. Increase of appetite for the street and things streety seemed, in my case, to grow with what it fed on, and in a short time I found that the limited space to which I and my companions confined our street operations was all too small to gratify my inclination in this respect; and this feeling prompted me to take a step in advance of my playfellows by enlarging the area of my rambles, which had hitherto

never extended beyond our own street. A good-natured philosopher would perhaps have been able to trace—to his own satisfaction, at least—my roving disposition to a “thirst for knowledge,” a crusty one would doubtless have at once attributed it to innate vagabondism, while non-philosophic and uninteresting persons might have thought it was merely a spirit of adventure; but my mother, when she became acquainted with my delinquencies, indignantly and emphatically declared that it was entirely owing to my “low disposition,” and she added that I was a little bad ‘un, and would grow up to be no good.

For some time my wanderings about town were undetected, as I returned safely and in reasonable time, and had I continued to act in that manner all might have been well. But then we are told that the best laid plans of mice and men gang oft agee, and the saying also holds good in regard to the plans of children. In the case of my childish wanderings, it fell

out, as it often does in the case of much older and wiser persons, and under more important circumstances, that the very success which attended my early efforts was ultimately the cause of my ruin. Emboldened by my success, I extended my travels to such a degree that I often got quite out of my reckoning, and was unable to return home, and the news that Johnny Robinson was lost again came to be regarded, owing to the frequency of its repetition, as quite an ordinary piece of intelligence by the inhabitants of our court. Sometimes, when lost, I would be found by my mother or the discovering parties sent in search of me: but in the majority of instances I was brought home by policemen and accompanied by small crowds of street boys. For this latter and, as it would at first glance have appeared, very disagreeable style of being taken home, I had a strong partiality. There was a bustle and excitement about it highly fascinating to a juvenile of my streety proclivities; and as passers-by paused to ask "What's up?"

and on receiving the usual answer, "Only a child lost," suggested some plan of their own for finding out and restoring me to my parents, and succeeding groups of children escorted me to the confines of their respective districts, I was proudly conscious of being, if not a person of importance, at least "an object of interest." Sometimes when being taken home in my favourite manner, we (the policeman and myself) would be met by some of those jolly, pleasant-looking old gentlemen of the Brothers Cheerible type, whom children instinctively recognise as their friends, and these old gentlemen, on ascertaining from the policeman that the "little fellow" was lost, would pat me kindly on the head and give me a penny to get a cake with, and some of them would even give the policemen "something to get a glass for himself with." And here let me observe that the "something" in this case was well bestowed, for though policemen may have disagreeable peculiarities and weaknesses, they are generally very

kind in their dealings with lost children. I have seen one of the grandest of them, a broad-shouldered, large-whiskered six-footer, who was the terror of all the roughs and the admiration of all the cooks on his beat, and who had as great an idea of his own importance and dignity, and was as proud and careful about his personal appearance, as the most aristocratic of footmen—I have seen this policeman carrying a ragged dirty little child in his arms and trying to the best of his abilities to be playful with it, regardless of the jeers and chaffing remarks of a mob who followed him, and who were rejoiced to see him under what they considered such humiliating circumstances.

Nor were the meetings with these old gentlemen the only pleasant incidents connected with these journeys. Comely young matrons, upon learning the circumstances of the case, would, after giving me a kiss or a kind word, insist upon giving me “a piece,” and such a piece, too! Not one of your thick, clumsy, ordinary pieces

—not one of your crusty “hunches,” or anything of that kind, but one of those rarer pieces that were usually only given upon festive occasions, or as a reward for meritorious conduct, and known as “sugar butties;” a style of piece that only the cunning hand of a mother could turn out in all its sweet perfection, and which was made by taking two thin-cut slices of bread of equal size, spreading them thickly with butter, covering them with sugar, and then pressing them together with the sugared sides towards each other.

While, however, some of my wanderings were thus made pleasant by the gift of penny cakes and deliciously manufactured “pieces,” others were productive of very disagreeable consequences. In addition to meeting with numerous mishaps of a trifling nature, I had upon two occasions been brought home in a state of nudity, having been decoyed into some obscure place and there stripped of my clothes by some of those sneaking, heartless hags who prowl about

the poor neighbourhoods of large towns preying upon helpless children, and for whom, but that in the catalogue they count for women, a flogging would be the fittest punishment ; and on another occasion I had been brought home captive, charged, and justly so, with the dreadful crime of having thrown a stone through a window, for the repair of which my parents had to pay.

I need scarcely say that my mother viewed these occurrences with feelings of the utmost alarm. That her Johnny, in whom she had taken so much pride, should be found wandering about the streets, an object of commiseration for other mothers ; that he should be brought home by a policeman, or be robbed of his clothing, or charged with breaking windows, were to her one and all painful and humiliating ideas. My downfall she considered was entirely owing to my association with the other children in the court, and, as I have already said, she had attempted to separate me from them by talking about beggars and black men, and trying to keep

me in the house. But finding that these means were unavailing for the purpose they were intended to effect, and that I was, to use her own expression, going from bad to worse, she determined to take some decisive step for the purpose of bringing me back to my former state of respectability, and of restoring her own now somewhat tarnished reputation as a model mother. After carefully considering the case in all its bearings, she came to the conclusion that the best way to carry out her determination would be to remove to another neighbourhood, as by that means I would be withdrawn from the companionship of those to whose example and influence she ascribed my degeneracy. This plan being decided upon, and having received the sanction of my father, another house and neighbourhood were soon selected. Our new house was, like the one we had previously occupied, situated in a court, but both the house and the court were considerably larger than those we had left, and the same might be said

of the rent. My mother had displayed a considerable degree of skill in selecting the situation of our new residence. There was an air of respectability and primness about the court and its inhabitants, and more especially the juvenile portion of them, that was utterly blighting to all things streety; a state of things that was in a great measure owing to the influence of the owner of the court, a maiden lady named Miss Brown, but commonly called Old Jenny Brown, who resided in one of the houses, and was thus enabled to keep a strict watch upon the proceedings of the other tenants; upon any of whom who did, or gave any indication of attempting to do, anything that she considered derogatory to the order and respectability of the court, she was instantly and most emphatically down. Jenny was a very tall, very angular, and very thin old lady, with a carriage as upright as that of a grenadier. Her face was long and thin, with high cheek bones, thin and almost bloodless lips, deeply sunken eyes and overhanging eyebrows, and a

very large nose, that suggested the idea that it had been made to order for the purpose of supporting the heavy pair of spectacles without which she was never seen in public. Concerning her age there was no positive information, and her personal appearance furnished no indications on the subject. Her face was too hard and thin to admit of wrinkles, and as she always wore a black cap and a false front, the colour of her hair could only be guessed at; and though the hardness of her features and the fact of her wearing false hair were in themselves sufficient to prove that she was past her bloom, they helped to defy any attempt at calculating her exact age, which might be supposed to be anything between forty-five and threescore and ten years, according to the tastes and impressions of the person hazarding the supposition. The general opinion was, that however long she lived she would never look any older, while those who had known her longest asserted that she had never looked any younger. But if there was

any uncertainty respecting her age, there was none regarding her temper, for no one could come within the reach of Jenny's influence without being made aware that it was one of the worst, most exacting, and dictatorial that ever old maid or strong-minded female was endowed with. The chief object of her life seemed to be the maintenance of the respectability of her court; and in carrying out this object in accordance with her own notions she ruled her tenants with an iron hand. She was in her own large and bony person a perfect incarnation of domestic order, and did her own household work, saying with a fiery sniff, if any person expressed surprise at a woman of her wealth and position scrubbing her own doorsteps,—an operation which she might be seen performing at eight o'clock every morning and nine o'clock on Saturday nights, in order to obviate the necessity of doing it on Sunday morning,—that she wouldn't see any of the slovens that pretended to be servants now-a-days in her road. After breakfast she

would proceed to take a critical survey of the court, and if, in going her rounds, she detected an unpolished door-handle, an unblackleaded knocker, or unwashed steps, or any other indication of a lack of, or falling off from, the supreme cleanliness and order which she considered essential to the maintenance of the high and exceptionable respectability of her court, she would at once call upon the negligent tenant, and give them "a piece of her mind;" which piece of mind was generally embodied in a statement to the effect that such a Blackenhall Street (one of the worst streets of a notoriously low and dirty neighbourhood) style of things would not do in her houses, and that there must be an immediate alteration for the better if they wished to remain her tenants. And as Jenny, though somewhat eccentric, was, in such practical points as keeping her houses in thorough repair, and not pressing for immediate payment of rent when sickness or loss of employment was the cause of a tenant's falling into arrears, and the

tenants were the material gainers by the respectability of the court, those of them who were naturally disposed to be clean and orderly submitted to her tyranny on polishing and scouring points with a tolerably good grace, while any really slovenly ones who by chance got into the houses were either driven to leave them, or received notice to quit.

Jenny's great aversion, however, in her character of landlady, was children. She preferred childless tenants, and made it an invariable rule never to let her houses to families in which there were, at the time of their entering upon the tenancy, more than two children. Nothing, said Jenny, destroyed property so much as a lot of children, and besides their mothers were always quarrelling about them, and nothing so injured the reputation of a street as women's quarrels. And so, while professing to rather like children, as a woman, and in the abstract, Miss Brown objected to those "incumbrances," in her capacity of owner and manager of household

property, as likely to prove detrimental to the character of "Brown's Court." It was only from the consideration that she supposed we must all have been children once, and that they (the children) must be somewhere, that she allowed any of them to become dwellers in *her* court, against the peace and respectability of which she considered that every woman who had an addition to her family while living there, grievously and wilfully sinned. The few children who did live in the court were, as might naturally be expected, of a quiet and subdued disposition, and were, as was also to be expected, in keeping with the character of the court in being thoroughly clean and orderly. Most of them, from two years old and upwards, went to school, and when they were at play after school hours, their games were of a quiet character, very different from the noisy, romping sports—often leading to a fight amongst the children, and a quarrel between two or more of their mothers—of the numerous and streety

juveniles of "the court where I was born," and consisted chiefly of playing at school or keeping house. It was in this latter game that I first joined them on the second day after my arrival in the court, and on this occasion I speedily brought disgrace upon myself, and horrified my highly respectable playmates, by using bad language to the mother, a sedate little matron about five years old, and kicking the shins of the father, a grave young gentleman of about the same age, in consequence of their having, in the discharge of their temporary parental duties, boxed my ears—boxing the ears of their children and reminding them, at the slightest attempt at self assertion, that *they* were not the father or mother, being their idea of the whole duty of parents. This violent conduct upon my part put an immediate stop to the play, and caused what was in Brown's Court quite a tumult. While one of the children was informing his mother, in tones of horror, that the new little boy had called Mary Ann Cooper a devil, and

kicked Billy Perkins on the leg, old Jenny Brown appeared on the scene, and, having heard this recital of juvenile depravity, threateningly addressed "the new little boy" as a little ruffian, and glared at him through her spectacles in a gorgon-like manner that caused him to fly howling, and augured unfavourably for his parents' continuance in their present position of her tenants.

"Calling names," kicking shins, and throwing stones, and other proceedings of a like hostile character, having been very little thought of occurrences amongst my former companions, a quarrel and reconciliation with them usually taking place within the hour, I soon forgot all about this little disturbance and old Jenny's terrible glance. The next evening, when the children had returned from school and were at play, I went to join them as unconcernedly as possible, and was accordingly—as far as I was at such a tender age capable of being—filled with surprise and indignation at finding myself cut dead, a thing which is *felt*, if not understood,

even by children, and upon which in this case the juveniles of Brown's Court left no room for mistake, as one of them candidly informed me that their mothers had told them not to play with me, as I was an ill-bred little wretch. Under these circumstances I acted, as is frequently the wont, not only of children but of their elders also, upon the principle of calling the grapes sour, by telling these little exclusives that I did not want to play with them, that they couldn't half play, that keeping house, or playing at school, was nothing of a game compared with the games that I had been used to and would have taught them, and concluded by putting my tongue out at them, "pulling a face," and exclaiming, "Yah! yah!"

Being through this quarrel thrown upon my own resources for amusement, I took to exploring the street from which the court branched off, and admiring and wishing for the possession of the contents of the more attractive shop windows in it. In two or

three days, however, I had thoroughly "done" this by no means extensive street, and it then became necessary for me to seek fresh streets and shop-windows new in order to fill up my time, and gratify my taste for the novel and the beautiful in things streety. Accordingly one day, a little more than a week after we had removed to Brown's Court, I extended my afternoon ramble so far that I entirely lost my reckoning. But though dimly conscious of this fact, I had that sort of instinctive reliance on Providence and the police which my mother expressed when she said—speaking of the frequency of my being lost—that, like a bad shilling, I always turned up again; and being among new scenes I wandered contentedly on. The shades of evening were rapidly closing in ere I bethought me that it was time to set up the half-howling, half-crying sound of lamentation with which it was my practice to announce to passers by that I was a lost child. My cries soon had the desired effect of attracting notice,

for a stout old lady, whom I rather startled by my first howl, seeing that I was alone, came and asked what was the matter with me.

"I'm lost," I answered, repeating the first part of a lesson that I had been taught with an especial view to occurrences of this kind.

"And don't you know where you live?" asked the old lady.

"Three Lambs' Buildings, Castle Street," I said, repeating the concluding portion of my lesson, though of course that was not now my address.

Having learnt this much the old lady took me by the hand and walked with me until we met a policeman, to whom she handed me over, telling him that I was lost, and giving him the address that I had given to her. Lambs' Buildings not being on the beat of this officer or the one next to his, I was passed on by him and his brother to the one in whose beat they were situated. On arriving there, the policeman of course discovered that that was no longer my place of

residence and received my right address, and I was then passed on through several other "beats" until I finally reached home between nine and ten o'clock in charge of a policeman, and escorted by a small and, I believe, rather disrespectable looking crowd. The noise of my arrival brought out a number of the inhabitants of the court, and amongst them its termagant landlady. Exasperated to the last degree at seeing this invasion of her territory, Jenny at once commenced to pour forth a tremendous volley of abuse upon the heads of the intruders ; but they not being her tenants, and belonging to a class for whom "jawing" had very little terrors, made very light of Miss Brown's efforts in that line, responding to her invectives by "ironical cheers" and cries of "well done, old gal," "go it, Sal, I'll hold your bonnet," and finally by bursts of groaning, amidst which the hitherto undefeated Jenny was fain to beat a retreat. She, however, kept her wrath warm through the night, and in the morning came to

my mother and in a furious tirade gave her "notice to quit," but after letting the steam off she cooled down a little, and consented to withdraw the notice on my mother promising that I should be packed off to school on the following Monday morning.

CHAPTER V.

I AM SENT TO SCHOOL, AND FIND A GUIDE, PHILOSOPHER,
FRIEND, AND SWEETHEART IN MISS COOPER—INFANT-SCHOOL
LIFE AND TALK.



WITH a view to carrying out her promise, my mother made some inquiries amongst her new neighbours, and found that most of their children of both sexes went to a woman's school in the next street. This school they assured her was a highly respectable one, being kept by the widow of a dissenting clergyman, and its select character was testified to by the fact that the terms were sixpence a week, whereas the payment to ordinary schools of the same class was only twopence per week. To this school my mother determined to send me, and she accordingly waited upon the "missis"

of it, and arranged for my admission on the coming Monday. About half-past eight on that morning Mary Ann Cooper, the young lady who enacted the part of the mother in the game of house-keeping in which I had so disgraced myself by resenting parental correction, and between whose mother and mine a feeling of good neighbourhood had sprung up, called for me, it having been arranged that she was to take care of me for a day or two and put me in the ways of the school, of which she had been a scholar for a year and a half.

When my school guide, philosopher, and friend that was to be arrived my mother was just putting the finishing touches to my toilette, and having carefully wrapped my school wages in a piece of paper, and given me a kiss and a penny for myself, she committed me to the care of that young lady.

"Is school a nice place?" I asked Miss Cooper, as hand in hand we walked along.

"O! beautiful," she answered.


"And what shall I have to do there," I asked.

"Learn your A B C ; and I take the A B C class sometimes, and I'll favour you, you know, Johnny," she said, lowering her voice and putting her arm around my neck in a most loving manner.

Not knowing what "favouring" meant, I was rather at a loss for a reply, but was speedily relieved from my embarrassment by Mary Ann taking up the conversation.

"Do you like toffee, Johnny?" she asked in a low, persuasive tone, and drawing me closer to her side.

Toffee being the universal weakness of civilized childhood, I of course at once replied that I just did, and my companion then informed me that by a strange coincidence she too liked toffee, and, curiously enough, knew a shop, which she would be happy to point out to me, where five sticks of that delectable article were to be bought for a penny. This offer I accepted,



and my companion then led me down a side street, in which she met another girl of about her own age, who was one of the scholars of "our school."

"Holloa, Mary Ann," said this girl, "where are you going?"

"Nowhere," responded Mary Ann, in a haughty tone.

"O yes you are," said the other; "you're going to the toffee man's."

"O no we ain't," said Mary Ann, shocked at having her veracity questioned in this unhesitating manner; "are we, Johnny?"

Thus appealed to, I, of course, replied that we were not.

But it *was* to the toffee man's that we were going my companion informed me as soon as we had got rid of her inquisitive friend, "only, you know," she said, "it wouldn't do to tell that Lizzie Simpson, for she's the greediest little thing that ever was."

The toffee man's shop was, as were many of

the small retail shops in Dockington, in an underground kitchen, to which access was gained by a flight of awkward stone steps, and pointing out this latter fact, Miss Cooper kindly suggested that she should "go in for them"—"them" being the five "longsticks" which constituted the particular pennyworth of toffee, which "the toffee man," as the proprietor of this special sweet-shop was called, was famed for selling. To this suggestion I agreed, and at once handed the penny over to her, when she quickly darted down the steps and after a time returned with the five sticks, from each of which, as I became convinced by subsequent experience, she must have taken a considerable piece.

"Here they are, Johnny," she said, giving them into my hand; "but *we* must eat them before we go to school, for if we don't, that Lizzie Simpson and a lot more 'll be begging from you; so we'll take our time, and them as is done their toffee first 'll help the other."

To this arrangement I thoughtlessly agreed,

and was a decided loser by the latter part of it, as my considerate companion easily despatched three sticks to my two. Owing to our having turned out of the road and walked very slowly while eating the toffee, it was after nine o'clock when we reached school, and upon the mistress asking Miss Cooper how it was that she was late, that artless young lady curtsied, and explained that her lateness had been caused by her having had to wait for the new little lad, who was not ready when she had called for him.

"Oh, very well," said the mistress, evidently satisfied with the excuse. "And so this is little Master Robinson, whose mother was here about him the other day, is it?"

"Yes, please, governess," replied Miss Cooper, with another curtsy, and passing on to her place in the school.

"And are you a good boy, Master Robinson?" asked governess, as she took off my cap, and gave me a kiss.

"Yes," I answered.

"Yes, what?" said the governess.

"Yes, in double deed," I replied, using a form of asseveration with which I had been familiar in Lambs' Buildings.

"That's not what I mean," said the governess, with a half-suppressed laugh; "don't you say 'mam' to ladies?"

"Yes, when they give me a halfpenny," I said.

"Oh but, you know, polite little boys say 'mam' whenever they speak to a lady. Now, try again. Are you a good little boy?"

"Yes" (and after a pause in which the governess whispered admonishingly, 'Now, remember'), "mam."

"Ah, that's better. Now go and sit there," she said, approvingly, and pointing to a stool beside her own chair, "and I'll come and set you a lesson when I've got the others in their places." And indeed, by this time it was highly necessary to place some restraint upon the

movements of "the others," as, while I had been receiving my lesson in etiquette, they had become decidedly uproarious.

While the governess was restoring peace and order, forming the scholars into classes and giving them lessons, I had a favourable opportunity for taking a view of the school, and as I write, I can see in my mind's eye the scene which, with childish wonder, I gazed upon as I sat on the little three-legged stool beside governess's chair on the morning that I became her scholar, as plainly as it presented itself to my material vision at the time. The school-room was the parlour of a small cottage house, and was about eighteen feet square. It was furnished with three benches, which, when formed into three sides of a square, afforded accommodation for the whole of the scholars, and each, when in line, was apportioned to one of the three classes into which the children were divided. Under the window stood a large table, at one end of which was gathered the "work" of the girls, who were

taught plain sewing and knitting ; at the other, the books and slates of the more advanced scholars ; and in the centre were placed (when not in use) two very tall, parti-coloured dunces' caps, of the orthodox fashion, with asses' ears attached, and a birch rod. Between this table and the fireplace stood governess's chair and the stool I occupied, the latter being specially set aside for new or very young scholars ; and the school-roomly appearance of the apartment was completed, and the bareness of its walls relieved, by a number of alphabetical and other cards, and cheap coloured prints of Scriptural subjects being hung round the room. The scholars were about thirty in number, from two to eight years of age, and rather more than half of them girls. Mrs. Wilson, or " governess," as she was always called by her scholars, bore no resemblance to the stock pictures of infant-school mistresses. She was not very old, wrinkled, and fierce-looking ; she had not a hooked, high-bridged nose, and neither wore spectacles nor a frightful-looking

cap ; and very rarely had the rod in her hands. She was about forty years of age, had glossy brown hair, slightly "picked out" with grey ; her countenance was pale and somewhat freckled ; her mouth was large, and her nose a compromise between the snub and flat ; but there was a sweetness in her large, soft, loving eyes that made children "take to her" instinctively, and gave an expression to her homely face that made it beautiful and attractive, despite the irregularity of her features. She was of medium height, and just *stoutish* enough to have a motherly appearance, and with her well-fitting dark dress, surmounted by a snowy little collar, fastened round her white, plump throat by a small silver brooch, and a rather coquettishly-trimmed cap on her head, she looked a very incarnation of *neatness*.

In about half an hour governess got the classes fairly settled to their lessons ; and then, taking a card from the wall, returned to me.

"Now little Robinson," she said, motioning me to stand up, "you must learn your letters, you know ; I'll teach you to-day, and then to-morrow you'll take your seat with those pretty little boys and girls you see on the last form."

While saying this she had seated herself in her chair, and drawn me to her side ; and everything being now in readiness, my first lesson commenced.

"Do you know what that is?" she said, pointing to the first letter on the card.

"A boat," I said, the capital A striking me as something like the pointed pieces of flat wood that I had been in the habit of sailing in the channel.

"O dear no," said the governess, shaking her head, "these are not pictures, they are letters, and this one is the letter A. Say 'A.'"

I said "A," and repeated after her a great number of times in the course of half an hour that and the succeeding letters, down to E, and that being considered sufficient for a first lesson, she told me that if I got on well with that

alphabet, in the course of a week or two I would be allowed to complete my alphabetical studies from a beautiful rhymed alphabet, beginning,

“A is an angel, who in heaven does dwell;
B stands for Bethlehem, as the scriptures do tell.”

Leaving me to con my lesson, the governess proceeded to take the morning lessons of the first, or reading class, and the second, or a-b, ab, class, while one of the girls from the first class “took” the alphabet class, from which latter there presently came a howl that startled the whole school, and which it turned out had been given vent to by Jenny Smith, in consequence of Johnny Shaw having, as she put it, stolen a piece of toffee off her. Accuser and accused were at once brought before the governess, and it then transpired that Miss Smith had entered into an arrangement with Master Shaw to the effect that she was to let him have three sucks at a piece of toffee in consideration of a piece of blue ribbon that, with the recklessness of spirit which the desire for

the possession of toffee produces, he had torn from the sleeve of his frock for the express purpose of this sweet barter. The first two sucks the young lady admitted Johnny had taken fairly, but in taking the third, he had snapped the whole stick out of her hand, and bitten a considerable piece off it before returning it. Indignant at hearing this charge, Master Shaw opened his mouth to its utmost capacity, and by his gestures invited governess to look into it; but this proved an unfortunate mode of protesting his innocence, for the piece of toffee was plainly to be seen, only partially, and not, as he had fondly hoped, wholly concealed by his tongue, and his guilt thus made unmistakably apparent. The governess readily and wisely disposed of this case, deciding that Smith had been wrong in the first place in having tempted Shaw to tear the ribbon from his frock, and that though Shaw was certainly wrong in having bit where he should only have sucked, his guilt must for the once be regarded in the light of poetical

justice upon Miss Smith, though he was at the same time informed that he would get the rod if he didn't mind what he was at.

There was no play-ground attached to the school, but at eleven o'clock each morning the scholars were allowed to go into the street and play about the school door, nominally for a quarter of an hour, though in reality the length of time devoted to play depended upon the nature of the preparations for "Samuel's dinner," Samuel being governess's only son, who was at this time in the last year of his apprenticeship to the trade of a carpenter. By the time the case, *Smith v. Shaw*, had been disposed of, and the lessons of the classes taken, it was eleven o'clock, and we were dismissed to our morning play, after being strictly cautioned not to go far from the door. Heedless, however, of this injunction, I, as soon as I had taken the bearings of my position, set off home, as I felt an irresistible craving for the luncheon, in the shape of a "piece" which I had been accus-

tomed to have about this hour. After making one or two slight mistakes I arrived at our house in safety, and my mother taking the fact of my presence there as a sufficient proof of the legitimacy of this unexpected visit, gave me the much desired piece, which I was just about to commence eating, when Miss Cooper made her unwelcome appearance upon the scene, and explained to my horrified mother that I had run away, and that she was deputed by governess to take me back. Upon hearing this my mother at once bundled me off, with the still untasted piece in my hand.

As soon as we were out of the court my companion, who affected to have then seen the piece for the first time, started back with a look of horror. Having thus attracted my attention, she proceeded to explain that if there was one crime which above all others was obnoxious in the sight of governess, and visited by her with the direst punishment, it was eating pieces during school hours; and in order to save me

from the consequences of my rash ignorance in this matter, she heroically offered to help me to eat the piece, so that we might finish it before getting back to school, and this offer she carried out in a manner that must have proved much more satisfactory to her than it did to me. When we got back to school the other scholars were already at their lessons, to which circumstance governess directed my attention, and then went on gently to explain, in a manner suitable to my understanding, that when we went out at eleven o'clock, it was simply to play about the door for a short time; but that at half-past twelve we should go home to dinner, and would not have to come back until two o'clock. After making me acquainted with these rules, she proceeded to test my knowledge respecting the five letters, the repeating of which had been my first lesson, and finding I had forgotten all of them but B, my studies for the first day were judiciously cut down to the first three letters. At dinner-time I was accompanied home by the

all-attentive Miss Cooper, and another little girl about my own age, who also lived in our court, but whose taking me by the hand Miss C. evidently regarded in the light of an encroachment upon her vested rights and interests in me, as she took frequent occasion to pointedly inform her that she had been specially appointed by Mrs. Robinson to take care of Johnny. On delivering me to my mother, Miss Cooper gave a very voluble account of the morning's proceedings—according to which it appeared that she had been of the greatest service to me, and had preserved me from all kinds of trouble—at the same time she reiterated her assurance that she would “favour” me when she took the A B C class, and for these supposed services past, and favours to come, she was rewarded with the gift of a halfpenny.

I returned to school about a quarter to two, still in company with my disinterested companion of the morning, and joined some of the other scholars in a game called “Jenny

Jones," which is carried on by the players dividing themselves into two parties, one of which stands against the wall, the other with their hands linked facing them, at a few yards' distance. When all are ready this last party begins to step towards the stationary one, regulating their movements by the time of a lively little tune, to which they sing the following words :

" We've come to see Jenny Jones, Jenny Jones, Jenny Jones,
We've come to see Jenny Jones, how is she now ?"

The party thus applied to take up the tune and reply—

" She's very well, ladies, ladies, ladies,
She's very well, ladies, how are you ?"

To this inquiry respecting the state of their health the ladies do not deign to reply, but begin to skip backwards to their former station, singing—

" Fare ye well, ladies, ladies, ladies,
Fare ye well, ladies, for we must away."

After a short pause they again skip forward, singing, "We've come to see Jenny Jones," &c., and are told in the same style that she is very ill, when they again retire, singing, "Fare ye well, ladies," &c. They then come forward a third time, making the same musical inquiries respecting Jenny Jones's health, and are informed that—

"She's just died, ladies, ladies, ladies;
She's just died, ladies, how are you?"

Upon which they once more, and for the last time, skip back, singing, "Fare ye well, ladies," &c. This game, I am told by the learned in such matters, is intended as a burlesque on the meaningless formality of the card-leaving calls enjoined by the laws of etiquette; but if such is the case, children are all unconscious of the fact that they are reading society a lesson upon its conventionality when they play at "Jenny Jones."

It was two o'clock when our game was finished, and we then went into school. The


benches were now formed into three sides of a square, and the scholars, instead of being formed into classes, took their seats at random, this being their practice when—as was the case now—they were going to have “exercise.” When all were seated, governess, beside whom I was again placed, called out in a drill-sergeant tone, “Attention.” On receiving this word of command the children extended their arms at right angles to their bodies, dropping them to their sides again at the word “Down,” and these movements were repeated until they were performed with almost as much precision as a movement in the manual exercise of a well-trained volunteer corps. The governess then gave a wave of her hand, and in obedience to the signal the children began a vigorous clapping of hands, keeping time to the tune of an irregular rhyme, running—

“Clap, clap, altogether, clap, clap away,

This is the way we exercise, as teacher says we may.”

This movement and rhyme were alternated by

the shooting in and out of the arms, and the singing of "Shoot, shoot altogether," &c.; and the drill which these movements jointly constituted was continued for three quarters of an hour. The sewing and knitting were then given out to those girls who were being taught "work," the slates to those boys and girls who were learning writing or arithmetic, and the lesson books and cards to the others, and comparative quietness reigned in the school. But before four o'clock—which was the hour at which we were dismissed for the day—arrived, the monotony of our proceedings was considerably relieved by both the dunce's cap and the rod being brought into requisition. The first-mentioned article was placed upon the head of a young gentleman in the A B C class, who had not only refused to say his lesson, but defiantly declared that he did not want to be a good boy, and didn't care what his father would think if he heard of his contumacious conduct. For this shocking behaviour he was made to stand in the middle



of the room, with the tallest and most grotesque of the dunces' caps on his head, while the other scholars pointed at him, and slowly chanted, three several times, "Dunce, dunce, double D, can't say your A B C." But this practical pointing at him of the finger of scorn had no effect upon this hardened young sinner, who evidently regarded the whole affair as good fun, and coolly informed his companions that he *could* say his A B C, and indeed could say down to H, it being the letters that came after that one that had so disgusted him with his alphabetical studies.

The circumstance which led to the use of the rod originated, as the disturbance in the morning had done, in toffee. One Davy Edwards had exchanged a piece of toffee for a bit of red glass, but presently repenting him of the exchange, he requested Freddy March, the other party to the transaction, to "cough up" and return the toffee, and being informed that that was an impossible feat, he insisted upon being allowed

to cut him open in order to recover the lost piece of Everton. And it was for persisting in expressing himself still willing and anxious to perform this piece of vivisection, after he had been informed that it would cause the death of Master March, that governess decided upon birching him, though the style in which she performed that operation was not such as to justify the horrible howling which the sanguinary-minded young gentleman set up when undergoing it. At tea-time I had plenty to tell my mother about what I had seen and heard at school; and after tea I went and joined in the play of the other children of the court, several of whom were now my schoolmates, and having patiently submitted to having my ears boxed by the father and mother when playing at keeping house, I became fairly established as one of the juvenile set of Brown's Court.

On the following morning I had scarcely crossed the threshold of the school when I was brought to a stop by governess asking me where

my manners were. Being unable to answer this question, I was next asked if I did not know how to make a bow to governess, and replying in the negative, I received a second lesson in etiquette in order to qualify me for executing that piece of politeness on future mornings, and was then assigned a place in the alphabet class. When our lesson cards were given out, the gentleman on whom the penance of the dunce's cap had been inflicted on the previous afternoon, and on whose left hand I now found myself seated, asked me in a whisper if I could say past H. Finding, from my incoherent answers, that I could not even say that far, he seemed greatly rejoiced, though it is only right to say that his joy arose rather from a fellow-feeling than a sense of triumph, and he informed me in a chuckling whisper that he would give me an acid drop when he got a halfpenny, which would probably be at dinner-time, as his uncle, who had come to see them, had promised to give him one then. This uncle, he informed me, was a

sailor, and had a great big beard and big black hands, and was in the habit of saying bad words to the cat. He had taken him (my informant) to the Circus on the previous night, had treated him to cakes, oranges, and ginger-beer while there, and after carrying him home on his shoulder, had promised to give him a halfpenny next day. At this point this interesting monologue (for I had been only a listener) was broken off by the girl who had been deputed to take our class giving the speaker a rap on the hand, and requesting him to make less noise, whereupon Master Johnson (for that was my new friend's name) immediately made more noise by exclaiming aloud, "My uncle 'll warm you, Sarah Thomas, if you hit me."

As it was raining hard at eleven o'clock, we could not go out to play, but we were allowed to talk while governess went into the kitchen to look after her son's dinner. The permission to converse was eagerly made use of, and all

kinds of children's topics—from the quality of sweetmeats and the fashion of dolls' clothes, to what they would do when they were men and women—were discussed. A little girl who was seated beside me struck up a conversation by asking me what I would do with a shilling if by any chance I happened to be in possession of so large a sum.

“Buy lots of things to eat,” I said; “wouldn't you?”

“Well, I should buy some things to eat,” she answered, “but I should buy dolls, and cradles, and picture-books besides.”

“Oh!” said a little boy, who had been listening to us, “I've got picture-books with giants with three heads and as tall as a church steeple in them.”

Before we could express our admiration at hearing this interesting piece of intelligence, or give vent to the curiosity excited by it by making inquiries respecting the triple-headed monsters, our wonder and fear were immeasurably

heightened by another young gentleman coolly and contemptuously observing—

“ Oh, I’ve *seen* a giant with five heads and as tall as the sky ?”

“ Where ?” we unanimously exclaimed.

This juvenile Munchausen had evidently intended his startling statement as a clencher, and was consequently unprepared for our question, so that there was a considerable pause, during which we were in a state of the utmost excitement, before he hesitatingly answered, “ In a place.”

This was rather a damper ; but, recovering from our disappointment, we next asked, “ When did you see him ?” To which he replied more readily, but, if possible, more vaguely, “ One day ;” and his answers to other questions being of the same vague and indefinite character, it began to dawn upon our mind that he had been drawing upon his imagination. A young lady of a logical turn of mind intimated her belief that such was the case by observing that giants

were buggy-boos, and buggy-boos only came at night, so that the five-headed giant who reached to the sky could not have been seen *one day*. Master Johnson, however, expressed his unbelief more pointedly by stigmatizing young Munchausen as "a big storier," whereupon that imaginative youth took the huff, and intimated in tones of displeasure that he wouldn't tell us anything else.

Encouraged by the silencing of Munchausen, one of the girls who had been listening to but taken no part in the conversation, ventured to say that her mother had told her that there were no giants, but this preposterously heterodox statement was received with the disapprobation and scorn that it deserved.

"No giants!" we exclaimed in chorus. "No giants, eh? Where, then, were the giants of 'Jack the Giant Killer,' 'Jack and the Beanstalk,' and divers other truthful histories?" asked my companions, who, although unable to read, were fully acquainted with the adventures and

exploits of the giant-slaying Jack and other juvenile knights-errant. "If there were no giants, where did the giants of these standard histories come from?" they asked, with the triumphantly sarcastic air of a cross-examining barrister putting a poser; but it was by Scripture that this daring young free-thinker was finally and irretrievably put down. One of the girls from the first class having wandered within ear-shot of our conversation, authoritatively decided the controversy by stating that she had read about giants in the Bible, and if the Bible said there were giants, of course there *must* be giants.

There were not wanting sceptics in the first and second classes, and even in the A B C class—as I found when I had been a little longer in the school—who were disposed to regard buggy-boo and the big black man, who was said (by injudicious parents and others) to be constantly waiting round the corner or ready to come down the chimney at a moment's notice to carry away naughty boys, as mythical per-

sonages, but the school faith in many-headed giants was strong, and we were still rejoicing over this decided and scriptural demonstration of their existence when governess re-entered the school, and lessons were resumed until dinner-time. The afternoon was again devoted to exercise work and lessons, and by four o'clock I had progressed so far in my studies as to be able to unhesitatingly identify A and B, thus bringing to a satisfactory conclusion the labours of the day that saw me settled down as a pupil in Mrs. Wilson's select infant school.

CHAPTER VI.

I AM RESTORED TO RESPECTABILITY—LOVE AND TOFFEE—
I LEAVE MRS. WILSON'S.



ENTERED this school when I was about four years and a half old, and remained there until I was eight, and though my recollections of that period—recollections that have been brightened by recent communication, with an especial view to these memoirs, with such of the friends or companions of my youth as the chances and changes of a rather knock-about life have still left to me—are sufficiently vivid to enable me to give a detailed account of this part of my school career, I think its history will be more interesting (if it has any interest at all) if epitomized, than if given with that minuteness which constitutes the graphicness that we so much admire in Defoe

and some other writers, but which would, I fear me, become a bore of the first magnitude in the hands of the present humble scribe.

It was at this school that I first practically experienced the potent character-forming power of surrounding influences. I had not been a pupil in it many weeks before the Bohemian spirit and mud-larking habits I had contracted in Lambs' Buildings were eradicated and replaced by manners and customs more worthy of the polished society in which I now moved. "Bad words" I came to regard with a commendable horror, and I soon began to entertain the same sentiment towards children of the stamp with which I had formerly been in the habit of associating, and to speak of such little "outer barbarians" with respectable aversion and disdain, as naughty boys or girls, who were ultimately destined to go to the bad place, and with whom it were contamination to play. And in this genteel tone of feeling I was confirmed by a barefooted, bareheaded, and generally

scantily-clothed young gentleman, much addicted to the use of "bad words," and whose acquaintance I had made when wandering about the street during the first week of my residence in Brown's Court, having given me a sound thrashing and bespattered my clothes with mud upon my informing him that I wasn't going to play with him any more, because he was a dirty, bad boy. I now began to take an interest in the colour of my frocks, and if I discovered a speck of dirt upon my pinafore or white stockings, it lay heavy on my mind, while any damage to the enamel or buckle of my belt or the tassels of my cap was a source of the deepest grief. I abandoned all but the mildest and most genteel of out-door games, and became a proficient in manners; of which last proficiency I made all visitors to my father's house aware by informing them that I always said "Thank you," when anything was given to me. And though among all this I must confess that I acquired a habit common amongst my schoolmates of giving

highly imaginative accounts of the wealth and possessions of my parents, I do not think any great harm could have resulted from it, as my stories were generally to some such effect as that my mother had three boxes full of silk dresses and a big chest full of gold and silver, and that my father was in possession of a tremendous sword, with which he had cut off the heads of five robbers.

My progress in juvenile gentility, imaginative story-telling, and the mysteries of sundry games of the Jenny Jones type, was, however, more satisfactory than my educational progress. I was, governess said, both dull and careless, and so backward was I considered at the end of a month, that the inspiration and incitement of the dunce's cap was considered necessary for my improvement. I was accordingly walked into the middle of the school, and the smallest of the dunce's caps placed on my head, while my schoolfellows sang at me the dunce, dunce, double D incantation, which completed the

ordeal of the dunce's cap. I did not stand this imposing penance with the cool, cheerful indifference that my communicative friend Master Johnson had done. On the third repetition of the incantation I set up a dismal howl, and attempted to tear both my hair and the cap, whereupon my hands were tied to my sides, and I was made to stand in a corner with my face to the wall for the space of an hour. At the end of that time I was released from bondage, governess expressing a hope that what I had undergone would do me good, though, as far as I can remember, it had not the intended effect of stimulating my mental powers.

But though I came under the ban of the dunce's cap at so early a stage of my scholastic career, I was very fortunate in escaping other punishments, as I had been fully five months at school before I "got the rod" for the first time. I then received an outward application of birch for having made Dicky Wilson's nose bleed, in revenge for that young gentleman, who was about

my own age, having called me "clat tale." I had repeated a statement that he had made to me, to the effect that Annie Brown, who was five years of age and the belle of the school, was his sweetheart, and that he meant to steal a doll's cloak from Sarah Thomas to give to her (Miss B.). This statement had, through my repeating it, come to the ears of Miss Brown, who indignantly denied the truth of it, openly stating that Harry Pearce was her sweetheart, and appealing to that favoured youth to corroborate her assertion, which he did without the least hesitation, threatening at the same time to warm Dicky Wilson. The latter's boasting having been refuted, and himself held up to derision, he turned his rage upon me, and, as I have already said, stigmatized me as a "clat tale," and enraged by the repeated application of this offensive, even if partly deserved, epithet, I fell upon him, and made his nose bleed. Such a sanguinary affray had never taken place in the school before, and it was immediately decided that, as the perpe-

trator of such an outrage against infant-school gentility, I was to be well birched. I was, accordingly, hoisted on to the back of one of the other scholars—whom it gave me a melancholy satisfaction to find staggered under my weight—and governess proceeded to execute the sentence, though in doing so she did not lay it on with that degree of vigour that might have been anticipated from the manner in which she had expressed herself regarding the heinous nature of my crime.

In the meantime, my first friend, Miss Cooper, continued to mark me for her own. We went to and returned from school hand in hand together, and loving at all times, she was particularly so on those occasional mornings on which I had a penny to spend ; and in dividing the toffee, in which she took care the penny should be spent, she still continued to act upon the same principle, more or less modified, as that upon which the clown shares property between the pantaloon and himself, I, of course, coming

in for the pantaloons' meagre portion. In the school games we were constant companions, and when, as sometimes happened, she took our class, of which I was, as already noticed, one of the dullest scholars, she nobly kept her promise of "favouring" me, if neglecting to teach me, and patronisingly saying, in the face of the whole class, "You needn't say your lesson, Johnny; I'll favour you," and so bringing upon me the hatred of my less-favoured compeers, could be called favouring. If this was favouring, favour me she certainly did, though whether I was benefited by this style of proceeding is rather questionable. Out of school, too, we were inseparable. Mary Ann now always refusing to accept the post of mother in the game of keeping house, unless I was allowed to officiate as father, and insisting that I should play on the same side as her in games of the Jenny Jones order. This being the state of affairs between us, it is scarcely surprising that the public voice should have assigned us to each other as sweethearts; and for

once rumour, it appeared, was correct, as upon mentioning this interesting report to Mary Ann, as we were on our road to the toffee-man's one morning, she put her arm round my neck, and, in her most seductive tone of voice, said—

“Well, I am your sweetheart, you know, Johnny ; arn't I ?”

My sense of gallantry was happily sufficiently developed to enable me to see that I was bound to answer in the affirmative, and I accordingly replied, “Well, yes, if you like.” And as Mary Ann did like, it was thus definitely settled that we were to be sweethearts, and our intimacy became, if possible, greater than it had been before.

But the course of true love, even when founded on a basis of toffee, does not always run smooth, and after a time the juvenile loves of Miss Cooper and myself were productive of an incident that put us to the blush, and in the estimation of Jenny Brown, scandalized Brown's Court. One Sunday my mother had had a

number of friends to tea, and these friends bestowed upon me a considerable amount of coppers, out of which I managed to secure threepence for spending money. This important and agreeable fact I communicated to my lady love, as we were going to school on the following morning. Upon hearing it she became loving in the extreme, and immediately proposed that the money should be laid out in a large supply of sweetmeats, to which, after she had overruled a proposition upon my part for the purchase of a shuttlecock and battledore, I agreed, and we then went to the toffee-man's, and changed the threepence for its equivalent in the choicest of his wares. The time consumed in selecting this unusually extensive assortment of confectionary gave us little opportunity for eating any of them before reaching school, and having happily negatived a proposal which, owing to our being pressed for time, Mary Ann had been compelled to make somewhat more abruptly than was her wont, to the effect that she should take care of

the sweet treasure, I entered school with the delightful consciousness of having in my pockets a feast of toffee and a flow of "all-sorts" sufficient for several hours' ambrosial sucking. During the time of morning lessons the loving looks which my sweetheart continually cast upon me became quite oppressive, and the expression of agony that crossed her face each time that she saw me furtively conveying a portion of the all-sorts to my mouth, considerably lessened my enjoyment. And when at last she detected me slily passing a whole stick oft offee to the young lady who sat next to me, and who, having found out that I was eating toffee, had threatened to "tell the others" if I did not give her some, the mute reproach of her glance made me feel uncomfortable to an extent that was beyond the reach even of toffee to cure.

Although while in this painful frame of mind Miss Cooper thought—as she subsequently informed me—that it would never be eleven o'clock, that wished-for hour did come round at

last, and, the day being fine, we were sent out to play. We had scarcely got outside the school door before Mary Ann took possession of me, and, taking me some little distance from the school, placed her arm round my neck and began to kiss me most vigorously, while with her disengaged hand, she commenced to help herself to the toffee that was in my pocket. While we were thus engaged a number of the other scholars, headed by the one to whom I had given the stick of toffee, came upon us, and taking in the state of affairs at a glance, fell to performing a kind of demon dance around us, at the same time singing in chorus—

“ Fie for shame, fie for shame,
Everybody shall know your name;”

a performance by which I was at first utterly confounded, and subsequently led to momentarily return to my former habit of using “ bad words,” and even the usually imperturbably self-possessed Mary Ann somewhat abashed. But this was as nothing compared with the sequel of the

transaction which took place in Brown's Court on the afternoon of the same day. I had been home from school about half-an-hour, and was still lingering over my tea, for which, owing to the quantity of sweetstuff that I had eaten in the morning, I had less appetite than usual, when I became aware of an unusual noise in the court, and on looking out saw the greater portion of my schoolfellows assembling immediately in front of our door. This movement I instinctively felt boded no good to me, nor did my instinct deceive me, for my school companions having formed themselves into a ring by joining hands, commenced to skip round and sing, in a tone loud enough to bring my mother and her neighbours to their doors—

“ Mary Ann Cooper's got a new frock,
Her petticoat wants a border;
Johnny Robinson is the lad
That kissed her in the corner.”

For some minutes my mother was unable to comprehend the meaning of this demonstration,

but presently becoming enlightened, she questioned and chaffed me about the kissing business until I began to cry from mingled shame and vexation. Nor did the assurance with which she then tried to console me, that if I had kissed Mary Ann there was no harm in it, restore my peace of mind, and it was with feelings of heart-felt relief that I at last heard old Jenny Brown, who had been out, coming up the court, and putting my unmercifully moral schoolmates to flight. The sense of shame was too heavy upon me to permit me to go out to play that evening, and when Mary Ann called for me on the following morning, its shadow still hung over me. But the young lady, I found, had not been so deeply affected by the occurrence of the previous evening, as on mentioning my griefs to her, she simply observed, "Well, *we* needn't care, Johnny ; sweethearts can kiss each other if they like." On reaching school, I ascertained that the scholars had been chiefly prompted to act in the manner they had done through being informed, by the

girl to whom I had given the long stick, that I had two pockets full of toffee, all of which I had kept to myself; and when we went out to play at eleven o'clock, they completed their revenge upon me for this act of selfishness by getting me in the centre of a ring, and running round me, singing,

"Greedy guts, greedy guts,
Eat all the world up."

Thus the money from the possession of which I had anticipated so much enjoyment became, in conjunction with Mary Ann's too demonstrative love, the root of a very considerable amount of evil to me.

But this was only the commencement of the troubles which broke the smoothness of, and at last put a blighting end to the course of my first love. Whether or not an oyster may be crossed in love is one of those problems in natural history on which the learned in such matters still disagree, but that a commonplace male juvenile, of the interesting age of five years, may be so

crossed, is a matter upon which my own youthful experience justifies me in asserting there can be no doubt. As my worldly wisdom increased, and my belief in the justness of my sweetheart's style of dividing the toffee purchased with my money diminished, tiffs between us became frequent, Mary Ann invariably going into the sulks and uttering keen reproaches whenever I insisted on sharing the toffee myself, and only giving her a fair half. But "tiffs" are the lot of all lovers, and, like many other things that seem very undesirable when merely contemplated, are nothing when you are used to them. Indeed, to the seasoned mind, tiffs become enjoyable rather than otherwise, and even to have your love passages detected, and publicly derided in song and dance by companions whose sense of moral propriety you have failed to conciliate by gifts of "all-sorts," is, after the first agony of shame is over, a bearable trial. But when you are ruthlessly jilted, and upon complaint openly reviled before friends, and in the presence of your hated and

successful rival, then may you indeed come to the maddening conclusion that you have loved, not wisely but too well. Well regulated indeed must be the mind in which such treatment does not replace the alighted love by hatred of the faithless fair. By such heartless conduct as this (as will presently be seen) the faithless and venial (alas, that I should have to call her so!) Mary Ann put an end to our courtship, and planted a feeling of estrangement and hatred where love had been.

After being decorated with the dunce's cap, made to stand on the line times innumerable, and being frequently told by governess that I was the dullest little boy that ever she had in her school; after my grieving parents had prognosticated, from my exceptional dulness, that I would never be anything, I was, at the end of ten months' study—though even then my knowledge of those letters that came after R was decidedly shaky, and a cross-examination confused my identification of letters considerably

nearer to A—promoted to the a-b ab class, where for several months the slowness I had exhibited in the alphabet class continued to characterize my progress. Children who had come into the class after me had got to words of two syllables, while I was still floundering amongst those perhaps expressive, but certainly uninteresting monosyllables, ab, ib, ob, ub; and save for a day or two after a new scholar had been admitted into it, the bottom of the class was my fixed position. And so governess continued to repeat, with daily increasing emphasis, that I was the dullest little boy that had ever been in her school, while the gloomy views of my parents respecting my future were confirmed.

In course of time, however, and by dint of much patient and conscientious labour upon the part of governess, ab and ub were conquered, and I then began to spell *words*. After a while I was able to spell out short sentences, to some such effect as that John was a bad boy, little Mary was a good girl, and Harry was in the

habit of doing what he was told. From this point, although I was at this time very dimly conscious of it, a change came o'er the spirit of my educational dream. For the first time I began to experience a *desire* to learn, and to see in reading a means of personal gratification, a power which would put me in the possession of all the glowing and truthful details of those stories of youthful adventurers who had encountered and defeated giants and magicians, and rescued and afterwards married ravishingly beautiful princesses, parts of which I had sometimes heard read by some of the boys in the first class. My advances in education from this point became—my former slowness considered—extraordinarily rapid. I had been six months in the second class before I got fairly past the *ib, ob* class of syllables, but in less than three months from the time when I first laboriously spelled out the information that good boys love their parents, I was able to read “short moral stories,” of a collection of which the highest

book of the second class consisted, and this degree of proficiency being the qualification necessary for admission to the first class I was duly promoted to that class. On making this step in advance, governess, who was naturally of a sanguine disposition, cheerfully predicted, as she gave me an encouraging pat on the head, that I would "be a man before my mother," while my parents so far modified their views respecting my future, as to indulge in the hope that something might be made of me after all. In the first class my educational progress continued in a most satisfactory manner, and by adopting the simple plan of skipping the hard words I was soon able to read ordinary books with tolerable fluency.

With the increased power of reading came an increased taste for it, and a corresponding change in my tastes in other respects. My general belief that there was nothing half so sweet in life as toffee remained unshaken, but the charms of longsticks and all-sorts, powerful

as they still were to sway my mind, began to be less irresistible when weighed against the possession of a penny edition of "Jack the giant-killer," "Jack and the Beanstalk," and other books of a like class. And though a love of sweetmeats is not necessarily incompatible with a taste for the perusal of the adventures of the heroes and heroines of modern juvenile mythology, the smallness of the amount of my "spending money" placed them in a position of antagonism in my particular case. The result was that many of the pennies that would at one time have been unhesitatingly spent with the toffee-man, were now, after a mental struggle against the fascinations of his sweet wares, laid out in books. Miss Cooper was not slow to perceive this change in my mode of spending my coppers, and naturally considered herself aggrieved by it.

"Why don't you always buy toffee like you used to do, Johnny?" she would reproachfully ask, on finding that I had been investing a penny in one of my favourite stories.

I would reply that I just wanted to read that particular book ; to which she would answer generally and still in an injured tone that books were no good after they were read, that I could borrow books of the others if I tried, and that she knew that I wouldn't buy toffee just because she liked it. Nor would she give any heed to me when I pointed out to her that toffee was no good after *it* was eaten, and that the others would not lend me books unless I had books to lend them in return, or when I fervently assured her that it was in no spirit of opposition to her natural and commendable taste for toffee that I occasionally bought books. To none of these excuses would my aggrieved sweetheart listen, the only terms on which she would consent to be appeased being that I should give an unconditional promise to spend my next penny in toffee. The alternate bickerings and makings up consequent upon the difference of opinion between Mary Ann and myself on the question of story-books *versus* toffee lasted for several

months, but, as might naturally have been expected, at length terminated in the severing of our connexion.

About three months after I was admitted to the first class, a new scholar, a boy of about my own age, who was the son of a general provision dealer, who among other things traded in sweets, came to the school. The new arrival, whose name was Morris, being able to read, was at once placed in the first class. As he readily fell into the ways of the school no particular notice was taken of him for the first two or three days ; but it then becoming known that he brought a large paper of sweets to school every morning, a number of his class-mates began to be very anxious to make his acquaintance. Of these, the most eager and most immediately successful was the perfidious Miss Cooper. As her attentions to Master Morris relieved me from her oppressive—even if loving—vigilance, and left me at liberty to spend my pennies as I willed, I was at first disposed to look upon them favourably. But her

pointed devotion to him, and open neglect of me, became so marked as to attract general observation, and the remarks of my companions on the matter at length roused the green-eyed monster within me, and determined me to assert the rights of my position towards the fickle Mary Ann. Accordingly, one morning when we were at play, and she was, as had now become her habit, attaching herself to Jemmy Morris, and guarding him from the approaches of others who might have designs upon his affections or sweets, I went up to her, accompanied by a band of sympathizers, and asked her what she meant by always going with Jemmy Morris, when she was my sweetheart; my coadjutors adding force and point to the question by singing the chorus incidental to all such occasions, "Fie for shame," &c. Thus attacked, she at first attempted to temporize, by saying that she only went with Jemmy sometimes; but this faltering explanation being received with merited incredulity, and redoubled singing of "Fie for

shame," Mary Ann, instead of being subdued, —as had been confidently anticipated by my advisers and myself—threw off all further disguise of her sentiments, and made herself mistress of the situation, by turning fiercely and defiantly upon me.

"I arn't going to be your sweetheart any more—I'm Jemmy's sweetheart now," she said, seizing that young gentleman's hand; "he gives me sweets every day, and isn't a stingy thing like you, Johnny Robinson, the Stobinson, the rick-stick Stobinson."

This tirade was delivered with an overwhelming vigour that rendered me almost incapable of retaliation, and it was in a very feeble tone that I replied to it, by calling the now loved and lost, Mary Ann Cooper, the Rooper, the rick-stick Stoooper, and informing her that I did not want anyone for my sweetheart who was always begging my things of me, and that I would warm Jemmy Morris if he spoke to me.

Miss Cooper having now got fairly rid of me, was enabled to turn her undivided attention to the new object of her interested attention, and soon managed entirely to monopolize his company, and a great portion of the sweets with which he was always plentifully supplied, and from this circumstance, by which every one with a sweet tooth and powers of persuasion considered themselves injured, more probably than from the intrinsic merits of my case, my class-mates of both sexes sympathized with me for having been so ungratefully thrown over by the selfish being to whom I had given so much love—and toffee. It was, therefore, with feelings of undisguised satisfaction that the class saw the machinations of the faithless Mary Ann at length result in her own ignominious downfall. Master Morris was, as events proved, of a fickle and self-asserting disposition, and about a fortnight after he had publicly accepted the position of sweetheart to Miss Cooper, on my unceremonious dismissal from the post, he began to resent

some of the more oppressive of that young lady's attentions, and was loudly heard to exclaim, in reply to some whispered remonstrance of hers, that he did not care if Martha Cheshire was a greedy thing, and that he would go with her (Martha) if he liked. But these symptoms of rebellion on the part of her new lover only induced her to increase her watchfulness over what she considered her vested interests in him, and one day when the rebellious and unstable Jemmy had refused to give her as large a share of his paper of sweets as she considered she was entitled to, she, as she had often done in my case, took them out of his pocket with loving force ; whereupon he set up a dreadful howl, and loudly accused the dismayed Mary Ann of robbing him. Upon this charge she was arraigned before governess, who made her restore the sweets, read her a severe lecture upon her want of modesty in always running after the boys, and forbade her for the future to stand next to a boy in the class, or to associate

with any of the male scholars during play-time. And this sentence of partial, and to the object of it most tantalizing, banishment, was strictly carried out during the whole of the three months that, after this occurrence, she remained at the school.

In the first class I continued to make satisfactory progress, and in the course of my last year at the school I got to the top of the class, was initiated in the simpler mysteries of numbers and writing, and became one of the select few occasionally appointed to take the A B C class, and then for the first time tasted what were, in this case, literally the sweets of office, in the shape of toffee, given to me by those who were unable to say their lessons, not to put them on the line. During the last few months that I was her pupil I had the honour also of being governess's errand boy, and was generally dispatched three or four times a day, with a little basket in one hand, and a red-covered memorandum book, in which the accounts were

entered, in the other, to a neighbouring retail provision dealer's, for pounds or half-pounds of sugar, butter, bacon, candles, and other articles of household consumption. As a reward for these services, I was permitted about once a month to settle the provision dealer's weekly bill, upon which occasions he always gave me a penny and a biscuit, and these, together with the opportunity of having a little play while going on the errands, made the post of governess's messenger the most envied to which any of the scholars could attain. My continuance in this position of threefold greatness, as top boy, messenger, and occasional teacher, was not, however, of long duration. I was nearly eight years of age ere reaching the climax of this triplicate height of power, and my father was already beginning to remark that I was getting too old to stay at a woman's school any longer. It was therefore decided that when my brother—who about this time had become a pupil of Mrs. Wilson—should have got properly into

the ways of the school, I should leave it, and be sent to a boy's school; and my brother having been sufficiently initiated into the ways of the school to be able to take care of himself by the time I reached my eighth year, I was accordingly withdrawn; governess giving me a parting kiss, a small book entitled "A Hundred Pretty Tales," an invitation to come and take tea with her some Sunday, and a penny to spend.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER NEW BROTHER—I AM MADE, IN A PAINFULLY LITERAL SENSE, “MY BROTHER’S KEEPER”—MY MONEY-BOX.

DURING the time of my pupilage with Mrs. Wilson, chances and changes by which I was more or less affected, and in some of which I found the commencement of my troubles in life, had been occurring at home, and chiefest among the domestic events that came to me in the nature of a grievance was the addition to our family of another new brother. This little stranger joined our home circle when I was about seven years old. On going home from school one evening I found the house in possession of a stout, red-faced old woman, from whom exhaled an odour curiously like that which I had noticed as appertaining to a neighbouring

spirit vaults to which I had once or twice been sent for a bottle of rum, wherewith my father was going to "mug" his strikers upon the strength of the profitable completion of a piece-work job.

"I'm agoin to be your mother for the next two or three weeks, lovey," said the old woman, in answer to my inquiries as to where my mother was, and concluding her reply by a spiritously-flavoured hiccup. "You're mother's ill, you know, lovey," she went on, noticing my puzzled looks; "the doctor have brought you a little brother from London, and I'm agoin to look after 'im and your mother and all o' you till your mother gets about again, which it wont be long I expects, for she's a doin as well as ever I see any one, and I've seen a few, I can tell you. However," she said, suddenly checking the rambling tone into which she was falling and making towards the stairs, "I'll show 'im you."

Presently she came downstairs with my new

brother, who she informed me was "the beautifullest little cretcher wot ever she had handled," in her arms. Having disengaged him from the numerous folds of flannel in which he was enveloped sufficiently to allow me to get a good view of him, she called upon me to testify to his exceeding beauty, which I, bowing to her superior knowledge of the subject, did, though I remember that my private opinion was that if there was anything special about him it was that he was shapeless. Later in the evening I saw my mother, who confirmed the nurse's statement respecting my brother's exceptional beauty, and told me that I must love him, which I of course promised to do ; though had I known at the time what I was to suffer through my beautiful brother I should certainly have given that promise with a most decided mental reservation. In about a fortnight my mother was about again, and to my joy relieved me from the power of my deputy mother, who during her brief period of government had ruled me with a

drunken though not wilfully unkind hand. She invariably sent me to school late and with my clothes huddled on in a most uncomfortable manner. Some mornings my coffee would be cold, grouty, and over-sugared, on others it would be scalding hot and sugarless; and while at one time it would sicken me with its turkish-like strength, at others it was—save from being slightly coloured—*coffeeless*. At tea it was the same, and at dinner time I had to forage for myself by picking up what scraps I could of the make-shift meal that was placed upon the table. I was never put to bed until long after my usual hour, and then I generally found the bed unmade, and had to turn into it unwashed, and often only partially undressed. When I ventured to ask any question about, or utter any remonstrance against any of these things, I received the invariable reply, “Oh, drat you, don’t bother!” For all these things the unlimited permission “to play about” after school hours, which the red-faced lady granted me, made but

small amends, and it was therefore, I say, in a rejoicing spirit that I welcomed my mother's convalescence, and the consequent return of order and comfort to our household.

My mother's resumption of the reins of household government, while it was the means of restoring domestic comfort, was, at the same time, the commencement of my troubles as the eldest child of the family. To be the eldest son of a family in which the eldest son is the unalienable heir to a title and estates is even in childhood doubtless a pleasant thing. The probabilities are that even in the nursery he will feel the advantages of the divinity that doth hedge a son and heir. He will in a variety of ways have "the pull" of his younger brothers, and attendants will take special care to prevent anything offensive or distasteful from coming between the wind and his embryo, but if he lives assured nobility. In short, he is as a rule destined to fill a more important position in society than his less fortunate because later-born

brethren, and is accordingly brought up in the way he should go. Even among the trading classes the eldest son, the one who is destined to perpetuate the commercial reputation of "the house," is not unfrequently treated with special consideration from his childhood upwards. But among the working classes these matters, as I was speedily fated to find, are managed in a very different manner.

The eldest son of a working man, especially in those families in which—as was the case in ours—there are no daughters, is for some years of his childhood in a much less desirable position than his younger brethren. It is true that even among the working classes eldest sons have their advantages. As first-born children they are petted and spoilt in a special degree, until the arrival of their successor in the family cradle distracts the attention of the fond mother and causes her to entertain some slight misgivings as to whether her first-born is really the paragon among children which she had considered it to

be. They get new clothes, or at any rate clothes only one remove from new, a considerable portion of the clothes of those of them whose mothers are handy with their needle being made from the cut-down garments of their parents, while their younger brothers have in turn to wear their old clothes as they grow out of them; and among strangers or visitors the pride of place due to their priority of birth is acknowledged. But these advantages are insignificant compared with the disadvantages which during some years of his childhood are inevitably incidental to the position of the eldest son of a daughterless working man's family, in relation to his younger brothers. He becomes the slave of those brothers, he is made to a great, and to him very irksome, extent literally his brother's keeper; and that at an age when the love of play being far more fully developed than fraternal feeling, he is led to regard that particular brother to whom he is for the time being attached in the compound capacity of

nurse, playmate, and body servant, as a sort of infantile man of the sea, whom he will be justified in getting rid of by any means.

Having been little more than an infant myself when the first of my brothers was born, I escaped comparatively free from the evils of elder brotherhood, so far as he was concerned, during the earliest period of his infancy. And though when he began to be able to walk, I was often commanded to take Tommy with me at times when his room was much more desirable than his company, yet, as he could walk, and would generally allow himself to be persuaded to sit quietly on some neighbouring door-step while I joined my companions in their games, I soon came to regard the matter lightly, and was therefore all the less prepared for the trial that awaited me in connexion with my last born brother. The misrule of the dram-drinking nurse and housekeeper had thrown everything into disorder, so that for some time after she came downstairs, my mother was unusually busy,

and my fate from this cause came with crushing heaviness upon me at the very beginning. On those mornings when baby was cross—which happened about five times a week—I was called up long before my usual hour of rising, and ordered to play with and try to keep him quiet until my mother prepared breakfast ; and when, as generally happened, my efforts to soothe him were unavailing, I suffered from the crossness of temper engendered in my mother by *his* persistent crossness, and was packed off to school with strict injunctions to come straight home at dinner-time, upon pain of “catching it” in case of disobedience. When, in compliance with this stern command, I did hasten home at dinner-time, my first salute on entering the house would be, “Johnny, just hold baby a minute, while I look after your father’s dinner.” But this minute often stretched to half an hour, and as baby was a very fine—that is, a very fat—baby, the effect upon my arms was of anything but a pleasant character, though the arm-ache was a mild in-

fiction compared with the mental agonies that I endured from my desire to join my playmates, a desire fanned to fever-heat by the sounds of their revelry which came through the open door, beyond which I was forbidden to go, lest the wind should blow too roughly on the cheek of baby. This miserable half-hour before dinner was followed by another equally miserable quarter of an hour after it, during which I had to hold baby while my mother cleared away the dishes ; and to the other miseries of this latter portion of my dinner-time martyrdom, was frequently added the humiliation of hearing schoolmates who called for me curtly told that Johnny couldn't come yet as he had to mind the baby. In the evenings baby was again heavy on my soul and arms. If by good fortune he happened to be asleep when I went home, and I got out after tea, the chances were that before I had fairly settled down to play, Tommy would be sent to tell me that baby had "woke up," and I was to go in and mind him. On going in I would be imme-

diately set to rock the cradle, with a view to "getting him off again," and for the better performance of the cradle-rocking business, I was specially taught the words and music of a number of such supposedly sleep-inducing rhymes as

"Hush-a-by baby on the tree top,
When the wind blows the cradle will rock;
When the tree bends the cradle will fall,
And down will come baby, and cradle, and all."

Sometimes after he had been awake for several hours at a stretch—as a rule, he was of an aggravatingly sleepless temperament—these incantations and the vicious energy with which I rocked him would send him to sleep; but when he once woke up, it was very rarely indeed that he would permit himself to be "got off" again, and then I would be condemned to nurse him until my own bed-time.

In short, baby, during the first few months of his existence, entered into and became the bane of my life. Whenever he wanted anything of mine

—and he wanted everything that he saw—I was compelled to give it up to him, upon the grounds that I was getting a great lad, while he was only a baby. Morning, noon, and night, I was condemned to mind him, rock his cradle, and do him service in a variety of physically-tiring and mentally-aggravating ways, that caused me, in my childish way, to wish that there had been no such thing as babies in the world, and to repine at my unhappy fate in having been born so long before Tommy, who, being now about four years of age, was able to play about by himself or with other children, and was allowed to do so at his own sweet will. Though even he might have been pressed into baby's service, had he not, fortunately for himself, put the cat in the cradle upon the first and only occasion that he had been put to watch the slumbers of his infant brother, with a view to giving his mother notice if he woke up. This incident had so horrified my mother that from that time forth she rigorously excluded Tommy from taking the slightest part in

the task of minding baby, which task in consequence fell with all its horrors unmitigated on my devoted head. Tommy might roam fancy and un-baby-burdened free; but I, the eldest brother, was the slave of baby—ay, and baby knew it too! and tyrannized over me. If he was awake when I entered the house he would immediately stretch out his arms towards me, and crow in an imperious manner; whereupon, saying, “He wants to come to you, Johnny,” my mother would place him in my unwilling arms. And when anything in my hand or about my clothes attracted his notice, he would set up a shrill cry, in which even I could detect an accent of demand, and would continue to cry and grasp at the object of his desires until it was given up to him, when he would give a chuckle of mingled satisfaction and triumph, and then settle down for a few minutes, during which I brooded o’er the wrongs that I endured from and through him.

As baby grew older, my position with regard

to him grew, if possible, worse ; insult was added to injury. When he was some eight or nine months old, and I began to take him out with me, and my mother, as sometimes happened, came and found baby seated on the ground, and me at play, she would seize me by the "scruff of the neck," denounce me as a very monster of cruelty, and, calling upon the neighbourhood generally to witness that I was a bad 'un, and that bad would come of me for my ill-treatment of that little dear, drag me home, with her scolding and the laughter of my companions tingling in my ears. Time, however, in my case, as it does in most others, brought relief. Baby, as has been observed, was a very fine baby, and at fifteen months old was able to run about by himself, and from that time I became comparatively free again, and I enjoyed my restored freedom with all the greater zest from having gone through a period of social penal servitude. And after all, my sufferings in this phase of elder-brotherism were comparatively light. Three

years elapsed from the birth of the baby to which I had been a victim before another child was born to our house, and by that time Tommy was old enough to become the servant of our last new brother, and I had progressed far enough in my education to be able to plead "night lessons" whenever called upon to do service to baby. And thus I had only once to go through the ordeal which some eldest sons of my own age and standing, but belonging to families in which there were a greater number of children than in ours, were called upon to endure three or four times.

Another grievance to which at this period I was subjected, in virtue of my position as the eldest child of the family, was that when Tommy was of age to be in some sort my companion and playmate, and we began to get into mischief together, I was always punished for both, upon the principle—very often erroneous—that, being the elder, I had artfully led my brother into wrong-doing for my own advantage. Thus,

when on Saturday mornings I was left in charge of the house and my brothers, while my mother was at market, and I had succeeded either in singing and rocking baby to sleep, or been driven by his crossness to that stage of desperation at which I was wont, when my mother was not about, to fling him into his cradle and let him cry his fill, Tommy and I would proceed to make for ourselves a primitive kind of confection, which we manufactured after the following manner :—We first placed a poker in the fire, and while it was heating took as much sugar as we thought it safe to do consistently with avoiding making our visit to the sugar-basin perceptible to the housewifely eye of our mother. Spreading the sugar on a piece of paper on the hearthstone, we applied the heated poker to it, and a black, brittle substance, which we dignified with the name of toffee, was the immediate result. The sugar would probably have tasted better had it been left unburnt, but the proud consciousness of the so-called toffee being our

own manufacture made it taste to us sweeter than the finest Everton. When I say my brother and I had been engaged in the manufacture and consumption of stolen sweets, and had, by tolling the sugar-basin so heavily as to leave the diminution of its contents too palpable, blackening the neatly-whitened hearth, or some other means, left unmistakeable evidence of our guilty proceedings, it was always I who got the whole of the bitters which, in the shape of "a good hiding," followed the sweets upon these occasions. This might be both morally and poetically just the first two or three times that it happened, as on those occasions I had been the sole manufacturer, and had merely given Tommy a small piece of toffee not to tell. But it certainly seemed to me to be as morally unjust as it was physically unpleasant upon those later occasions when Tommy had been the first to propose toffee-making; had, with the rash impetuosity of youth, insisted upon taking a larger quantity of sugar than I, in my greater wisdom,

would have allowed ; had, in trying to take a principal part in the manufacture, singed the carpet ; and finally, had made me give him the largest share of the toffee by threatening to tell if I did not. That on these occasions I should get a thrashing, while Tommy escaped with a mild rebuke, appeared to me anything but fair ; but any appeal of mine upon that ground was of no avail. I was always told that *I* was old enough to know better ; and as Tommy always unhesitatingly declared that I had “made him do it,” the case against me was considered amply made out, and there was nothing left for me but to take my thrashing and console myself by secretly resolving to “have it in for our Tommy.” Again, when in course of time Tommy and I were put to sleep together, and got more noisy than usual in conducting the attack and defence of fort pillow, it was always me who “got the strap” when my father, after in vain calling us to be quiet, came upstairs in a rage, though it was generally my brother who had been making

the noise, as I had learnt by painful experience to be quiet "the first time of asking." And for some years this sort of thing continued. I was constantly "catching it" for doing, and being told that I was old enough to know better than to do a variety of things which my younger brother—even after he was of age to be fully as capable as myself of distinguishing right from wrong—could do with impunity, simply because he was a younger brother.

Another great grievance of this period of my childhood was a money-box which my mother established under the name of "Johnny's Bank." My father, as I have incidentally mentioned, was at this time in the habit of taking piece-work, and, objecting to the then almost universal practice of paying his mates in a public-house, used on settling days to bring them to our house. As the receiving of piece-money tends to induce liberal feelings, these men, who, to the delight of my parents, pronounced me "a chip of the old block," and a regular Robinson, gene-

rally gave me any odd pence that came to their share ; and other visitors to our house also tipped me occasionally. For a time I was permitted to spend—or, as my mother put it, waste—the money thus obtained on toffee and other luxuries ; but my mother's natural thriftiness of disposition would not allow her to endure this state of things long, and accordingly, when I was between four and five years old, she established the obnoxious (to me) money-box, in which I was from that time forth called upon to put the money that was given to me. According to a legend invented by my mother at the time she introduced the money-box, I was always saving up for some article of personal attire, and it curiously happened that, whatever sum was given to me, it wanted exactly that amount to make up the price of the new belt, or cap, or pair of shoes that I would require next week. Even the penny a-week pocket-money which my father allowed me would have had to go into this insatiable bourne from whence no coppers

e'er returned to me, had not he taken my part in the dispute upon that point. Sometimes my mother would try to reconcile me to my compulsory economy by praising me for what she affected to consider my voluntary thriftiness, or dilating upon the surpassing beauty of the article of dress for which, according to the maternal legend, I was saving up; but these devices failing to dispel the gloomy sense of injury under which I laboured, she would change her tone, denounce me as an ingrate and spendthrift, who in after life would never have a penny to bless himself with, and conclude by giving me a good shaking—so that, for a variety of reasons, my money-box was hateful to me. While, however a great, it was not an entirely unmitigated evil. Sometimes when the odd coppers given to me by my father's mates amounted to as much as sixpence or eightpence, I managed, by a little juggling, to keep back a penny or two from the maw of the all-devouring box; and after a while Miss Cooper, with whom I was then on terms of

friendship, put me up to a move by which I was occasionally enabled to do it altogether. "I'll tell you what you should do, Johnny," she said, when I confided my grievance to her sympathizing breast, "you should watch till you see the people nearly ready to go, and then pop out and meet them when they get out of sight of your house, and then, if they gave you anything your mother wouldn't know;" and the plan thus suggested I pursued with a considerable degree of success.

But though I suffered from the grievances I have named and others of a less aggravating character, it must not be supposed that I was an ill-used child, or that my home-life at this time was, upon the whole, unhappy. On the contrary, while those things which, in my childish judgment, I regarded as special personal wrongs, were, for the most part, inseparably incidental to my position as the eldest child of a working man's family, some of the advantages which I enjoyed were of a much more special character. I was

always well and cleanly dressed, had abundance of good food, and was, as has been shown, regularly sent to school, while many children of my own age and rank, but who had mismanaging mothers or drunken fathers, were left to run about the street neglected, dirty, ill-clad and ill-fed. My mother would never beat me, as I have seen some mothers do, at the instigation of other people. If any one complained to her of "your Johnny," she would investigate the charge, and only chastise the offending Johnny when it was clearly shown that he had done wrong; and if I was "put upon," she would, at any cost of time and trouble, see me righted, or those who had "put upon" me punished for so doing, if it was possible for her to bring it about. And thus I had very rarely occasion, and never just occasion, to feel that bitterest of all feelings that a child can experience—the sense of wrong, namely, arising from the belief that they have been beaten not for their own offences, but to satisfy others, or that their parents are

indifferent to the injuries which others may inflict upon them. Even out of the evils of my lot there came occasional gleams of good. When I *did* get free from baby for an hour in the evening, that particular hour's play was doubly sweet, as were also the toffee and books purchased with the money saved *from* the money-box ; and when I managed to tumble Tommy out of bed when defending fort pillow, my laughter was to the full as loud and hearty as my howls when I got the strap. To my other sources of comparative happiness at this time was also added the implicit, unquestioning belief, and vivid, though erratic, imagination, which caused me to regard the heroes of fairy-land as veritable personages who had existed in the flesh, and dream of emulating their great achievements. And, all things considered, my home life during the time of my pupilage with Mrs. Wilson was one of the happiest periods of my childhood's happy days.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISCOURSE UPON WORKING-CLASS EDUCATION.



COMPARED with the children of the higher grades of society, the children of the working classes may, as a rule, be said to be precocious. As soon as they are physically capable of doing so, they are permitted to run about and mingle with the other children of the neighbourhood, and while still infants themselves, are entrusted with the care of other infants. When scarcely able to lisp the names of the articles for which they are sent, they are made to run errands, and many of them, while their heads do not as yet reach the level of the shop counter, are deputed to drive bargains with, or ascertain prices from, the retail shop-keeper, or to convey to him the oft-repeated promise of their needy

or worthless parents to pay some of the old score next week, or the last plausible invention of the parental brain for obtaining further credit. And but too frequently they are, alas, while yet mere infants, sent to the public-house, in the hope that their childish entreaties may draw the drunken father from it; or that failing, that their helplessness will disarm the violence with which the drunkard often resents any attempt to draw him from his haunts. From being thus early forced into contact with the realities of life, the children of the working classes, while yet at an age when the children of wealthy parents are still in the nursery, are more or less capable of taking care of themselves. At five or six years of age they are considered quite fit to be sent to, and competent to take care of themselves at, a large public school, numbering some five or six hundred pupils, of from five to fourteen years of age, drawn from all parts of a large and often rough district. When these things are taken into consideration, it is by no means surprising

that, on finding me still at an infant-school in my eighth year, my father should declare somewhat emphatically, that I was getting a great lump of a lad, and that it was high time that I was taken out of a woman's school; and accordingly at this age I was, as I have already said, withdrawn from Mrs. Wilson's school.

Although, from Mrs. Wilson being a woman of greater educational attainments and more conscientious principles than the majority of the women who keep private infant-schools, I had made a considerable degree of progress in the rudiments of education while under her care; I had been sent to her school in the first instance merely with a view of being out of the way. But the time had now arrived when the kind and degree of education that I would be likely to receive at it was the all-important consideration in selecting a school for me, and the task of making this selection gave my father, who now took me in hand, much thought. His own education had been of a very elementary character; he could

read sufficiently well to be able to wade through his weekly newspaper and *Punch*—which latter he bought second-hand, from a reading-room in the neighbourhood of our house*—in the course of Saturday evening and Sunday. If compelled by a combination of unfortuitous circumstances to do so, he could write a letter, the general purport of which might, with a little perseverance, be made out; and he kept the accounts relating to his piece-work in a perfectly correct, though somewhat peculiar, style, which, though ap-

* My father was entitled to take away the current number of *Punch* at the close of the room at ten o'clock on Saturday night; but it not being convenient for him to call for it at that hour, and as we were intimately acquainted with the woman who had charge of the room, I used to be sent for the paper on the Sunday morning, when the following little scene almost invariably took place:—

Mrs. — (a stout, comely, good-humoured Cumberland woman, who, though having charge of a reading-room, cannot read,) opening the front door and discovering Johnny Robinson solus.—Well, Johnny, lad, hast come for't paper?

Johnny.—Yes, please, mam.

Mrs. — (going back in the lobby a short distance and

pearing exceedingly hieroglyphical at the first glance, could, with a little explanation from him, be readily comprehended by any moderately good accountant. But beyond this limited knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic, his educational accomplishments went not. Unlike many uneducated or little educated working-men, however, he did not, on the sour grapes principle, affect to regard education as an effeminate and despicable thing; on the contrary, he set a very high estimate on its practical

shouting up-stairs).—Jenny, here's lile Johnny Robinson com'd for his father's paper.

Jenny (from within).—What paper, mother?

Mrs. ——.—Why, one with feather in't hat, to be sure. (A pause of some two or three minutes ensues, when *Mrs.* — again calls up the stairs.) Now, then, our Jenny, art going to be all day looking for that paper? Drat thee! I know thou'rt standing there gaup gauping at 't'pictures instead of doing what thou'st bid.

(A shuffling of feet heard above, and then the paper comes flying down the stairs, and is picked up by *Mrs.* —, who hands it to Johnny, observing),—

“There's some rare funny pictures in it this week, Johnny lad.”

Johnny.—Thank you, mam. (*Exit*—door shuts.)

value, and openly deplored his own want of it, and expressed his determination of giving his children better opportunities of obtaining education than had fallen to his own lot. Being a skilful and steady workman, and employed by a firm who gave good piece-work prices, he was at this time earning very large wages, and was thus in a position to give effect to his declaration that a bit of money should not stand in the way of making Johnny a scholar.

“You see, lass,” he said, talking the subject over with my mother, “an education and a trade is likely all that we will ever be able to give him, and I should look upon it as robbing him if we let a trifle of money stand in the way of giving him the best of both in our power.”

This was said in a deprecatory tone, as though he were under the impression that if such a proposition had been made as a matter of course, my mother’s habitual thriftiness of disposition would have led her to object to it. But any such fear as this—if he really entertained it—

was groundless—for, drawing me to her side, and fondly stroking my hair, she energetically exclaimed—

“Be robbing him! Well, I should say it would! and a very silly robbing it would be, too. What we spend on Johnny now will, as the Bible says, be like bread cast upon the water to return again in many days; and when Johnny’s a rich gentleman he’ll keep his old father and mother, if needs be; wont you, Johnny?”

To which I, taking it for granted, as my mother had done, that I would in due time become a rich gentleman, replied that I would.

It being thus agreed that no expense should be spared in respect to my further education, my father procured the prospectuses of a number of “genteel” academies and seminaries, and after anxiously puzzling over them for several evenings, he decided that I should become a pupil, at two guineas a quarter, in the select day-school of the Rev. Birchem Harder. But

“there’s a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will,” and this plan, a plan frequently adopted by working men anxious to give their sons a good education, but which, as applied to a boy of the working classes, is a very unsound one, was not in my case destined to be carried out.

The cashier of the establishment in which my father was employed used occasionally to come to our house—in the first instance he had done so for a consideration, but afterwards in a friendly way—to make out from my father’s books a properly got-up balance-sheet to be sent into the office on the completion of a job; and on the evening succeeding that on which my father had concluded to send me to the Rev. Birchem Harder’s select scholastic establishment, this gentleman called. He was a middle-aged Scotchman, and, in addition to being possessed of a considerable share of the shrewdness characteristic of his country, he was a well-educated and well-read man. From such a man

as this my father felt confident of receiving the credit which, without being guilty of egotism, he might fairly consider due to him for what he was doing on my account. But though, on confiding his plan to the shrewd and friendly Scot, he certainly received his due meed of praise for his commendable intentions, his satisfaction was materially lessened by his friend at the same time expressing an entire disapproval of his plan, and speaking of the proposed pecuniary sacrifice as equally unnecessary.

“Well, Robinson,” he said, when my father had explained his views to him, “I honour you for your intentions towards your boy, but I must say that I think your ideas respecting the education of a boy in his station in life are radically wrong. You tell me that he is destined for the trade, and consequently he must in any case leave school at fourteen years of age to be apprenticed; and now let us see how the matter stands. Here in Harder’s prospectus is a list of ‘studies’ fourteen in num-

ber, and comprising, in addition to an ordinary English education, two dead and two modern languages, an 'ology, and two 'ties, the three latter being the comprehensive names of as many abstruse and unrelated sciences, with which the mind of youth is utterly unable to grapple, especially when they have to study them not only in conjunction with each other, but with eleven other 'studies.' Now, I'll put it to you whether a boy can be expected to complete or even make a moderate degree of progress in all these studies between the ages of seven and fourteen. Why, a moment's consideration," continued the cashier, seeing my father was silent, "must convince you that the thing is simply impossible; and you may take my word for it that this cramming system, which is now the generally adopted one in private and semi-public schools of a far less pretentious character than Harder's—schools exclusively attended by the children of the better orders of the working classes—is as prolific a cause of the

ignorance that prevails among what ought to be the educated portion of these classes, as the total want of education is of the scarcely more lamentable ignorance prevailing among the less fortunately situated portions of them."

My father was, to use his own expression, "dumfounded" by the, to him, novel and unsatisfactory view of working-class education thus propounded; and the cashier, warming with his subject, went on.

"Indeed, it is questionable whether this system of *mis*-education in youth is not ultimately productive of worse effects than the absolute want of education. It is impossible for a mere boy to learn all the subjects professed to be taught under such a system, and the attempt to teach him so much results in his learning nothing, as it is evident that between fourteen educational stools the unfortunate pupil *must* come hopelessly to the ground. Then he is so harassed and persecuted by the multitudinous

exercises, and night and day lessons which the system necessitates, and which leave him no time for recreation, that he soon comes to hate books, lessons, and everything else pertaining to the work of education. So that when he leaves school he does so with a sense of relief, and, so to speak, shakes the dust of the land of education from his feet, determined to return to it no more. And worse than all, he leaves school fully impressed with the idea that his sufferings have not been all in vain, and that he is really well and completely educated ; and there being none so ignorant as those who are ignorant of their own ignorance, there is less hope for the youth who is growing up ignorant, ill informed, and unintelligent while imagining himself to be highly educated, than for the one who, being wholly uneducated, is conscious of his ignorance, and who may by a little perseverance pick up a kind and degree of education which would do far more towards making him an intelligent member of society than all the showy, imperfectly-

taught, speedily-forgotten studies of the select schools."

"Why," broke in my father, you wouldn't have me not educate him at all, would you?"

"Well, not exactly," said the cashier, smiling; "for, as I was about to observe if you had not interrupted me, the boy in the working-class rank of life, who, before being sent to work, has received such a degree of elementary education as interests without disgusting him, and is at the same time sufficient to enable him to continue his own education without the aid of a master, is far more likely than either a mis-educated or wholly uneducated boy to become in time one of those interesting but at present rather scarce individuals—a really intelligent artizan; and it is an education of this kind that I would advise you to secure for your son during his school days."

Being open to conviction, my father could not but be struck by these observations, and he tacitly admitted his conversion to a belief in

their general soundness by asking, in reply to this last remark—

“ Well, how would you recommend me to set about getting him such an education ?”

“ Well,” answered the cashier, “ what I would advise you to do is to send him to the Borough School. It’s a very large school, and, it must be confessed, a rather rough one, as it is avowedly *unselect*, but then it will be much better for him to learn to rough it a bit than to imbibe a lot of snobbish, shabby-genteel notions that would subsequently have to be thrashed out of him in the workshop. And then if the scholars are not genteel, neither are the payments, three halfpence per week per scholar being the standard charge, and “ no extras,” while the education given, though apparently insignificant compared with that set forth in a fourteen or seventeen study-power prospectus, is in reality a much more substantial and beneficial one. Being practically confined to reading, writing, and arithmetic, which, be it remembered, are the solid basis of *all* education,

those subjects are taught with a degree of thoroughness impossible of attainment in any school conducted on the cramming system; and in learning these in a comprehensive manner, the pupil incidentally obtains a considerable general knowledge of a number of the most useful of the subjects of the genteel studies. What at the first glance might appear drawbacks in this simple system," continued the cashier, "are really advantages. Thus the school authorities supply all the books and other educational appliances for the use of the pupils, and, as might naturally be expected, they are much more sparingly provided than in schools in which each pupil pays for his own, and the master has frequently a profit upon the sales. The consequence of this comparative absence of what may be called the mechanical appliances of education is, that the teacher is to a considerable extent really a teacher, and has to *teach* his pupils instead of in merely listening to them repeating lessons learned 'off book,' and counting the

number of mistakes they make after the manner of the so-called teachers of many of the more pretentious schools. Take the important subject of arithmetic, for instance. In the genteel working-class schools in which the pupils find their own books, and pay from sixpence to a shilling a week each, every pupil has a copy of the arithmetic, or, as it is generally called, 'Tutor,' used in the school. Out of this tutor the boys of each class have every night to do a certain number of sums, to which the answers are given in the book, and show them to the teachers on the following morning. And now," asked the cashier, with the air of a person putting a poser, "how do you think these sums are done?"

"By the rules in the book, I suppose," said my father.

"Well, that of course," answered the cashier, "but that was not exactly what I meant. What I alluded to was the manner in which the boys work the oracle, so as to be able to take

the sums to school in the morning, worked out, and with the right answers, while really knowing nothing of the general principles of arithmetic, or of the particular rules applicable to the sums in question."

"Why, it would require a good deal of oracle-working to do that, I should fancy," said my father.

"Well, not so much," said the cashier; "like many more apparently very difficult things, it is very simple when you once know how it is done. In the class of schools to which I am referring, the sums, when done, are copied into account-books, and these books, when filled, are given, either in the way of friendship or for a consideration, to boys who are engaged upon the sums entered in them, and from these easily-obtainable cribs many of the boys habitually copy out their sums. Then there are a few boys who, having a natural aptitude for arithmetic, really work out their sums; and from these others, who do not go the length of taking a wholesale crib, copy

the statement of the questions. The result of all this is that a large proportion of the boys educated in schools of this kind, go through a tutor, and are supposed to understand even the highest rules of arithmetic, while they are ignorant of its fundamental principles, and would be utterly astonished if they were told that the whole science of arithmetic consisted in a thorough knowledge of the first four rules, all the others being merely logical combinations or applications of these primary ones. Now, in the school to which I am recommending you to send Johnny, a very different plan of teaching is adopted. Arithmetic there is taught *in* the school, and is taught without the aid of a book by the teacher, who explains the nature and mode of operation of each rule, illustrates its principles and application by working out examples upon a black board, and replies to any questions that his pupils may put to him, with a view to properly understanding his explanation. These proceedings are persevered in until the

whole class—with perhaps one or two dull exceptions—affirm that they understand the rule. The teacher then calls out pupils one at a time, and sets them to state and work questions upon the black-board, the other pupils meanwhile watching operations to correct (if they can) any mistakes that may be made. This practice is continued until the teacher is satisfied that the general body of the pupils in the class comprehend the principle of the rule, and then the class is, in technical phrase, “put into” it. That is to say, their arithmetical lesson will consist of sums in that rule given to them by the teacher “out of his head,” and worked under his eye, and gradually increasing in difficulty and extent of application, until they reach the point to which the practical use of the rule is ordinarily limited. A class remains in a rule until such time as the head master considers, from occasional examination, that the general body of the pupils are well grounded in it. This process, under which a class may remain in one rule of

arithmetic for many months, appears a slow one ; but the progress made under it is sure, and it is real substantial progress, involving a sound knowledge of arithmetical principles and their application, and is of infinitely greater practical value than the more showy, apparently more rapid, though in point of fact merely nominal, progress achieved under the cramming system. And this difference in the mode and results of teaching arithmetic is characteristic of the general and essential differences between the cramming and what may be called the old and limited system of working-class education. Not, understand me," explained the cashier in a parenthetical manner, " that I object in the abstract to the teaching of such things as classical and modern languages, and physical sciences. On the contrary, I consider that no man can be regarded as educated in a scholarly sense unless he possesses a good knowledge of them, and I think they ought to form part of the education of every man the circumstances of whose position admits

of his being taught them. But the circumstances of the working classes, which necessitates their being taken from school at an early age, do *not* admit of their being taught these higher branches of education, and the attempt to teach them a multiplicity of subjects is a grievous mistake. It not only miserably fails in its object, but is the means of preventing many of the most advantageously situated of them (the working classes) from attaining that useful and elevating proficiency in the simpler and more essential branches of education which, but for the distracting influences of the attempt to teach them more than it was possible for them to learn, they would in all probability have done."

During this long harangue, my father's face had been expressing the utmost astonishment, partly at the doctrines set forth, but chiefly at finding his friend so well up on the subject of working-class education. Observing this, the cashier said, "You seem surprised to find that I

know so much about this matter ; and I must say that your surprise is natural, for the subject is not much in the way of an old bachelor like me, and indeed it is only lately that I have known anything about it. You see that the firm, to oblige gentlemen with whom they were acquainted, have at different times taken boys from the Borough school into the office, and I invariably found that these boys, who were only taken as a favour, and were supposed to be comparatively uneducated, were, both in point of technical education and general intelligence, much superior to the boys who came from more expensive and select schools. This set me to thinking and making inquiries upon the subject, and the result of my thoughts and inquiries is, briefly, that I recommend you, as a friend, to send your son to the Borough school.

“ There is just one other thing in connexion with the system of education pursued in that establishment that I would just like to mention to you,” continued the cashier, dropping the

parenthetical and resuming the colloquial tone, "and that is, that it involves very few night lessons, so that the pupils can devote most of their evenings to play, or to that self-education that comes of reading. And do you know, Robinson," he went on, speaking with increased emphasis, "it's my opinion that the chief aim of working-class education ought to be to establish and direct a taste for reading. A working man having very little opportunity of travelling, and his actual experience of society being, as a rule, confined exclusively to his own section of it, it is chiefly by reading that he will be able to gain a knowledge of the constitution of society and the modes of life and differences of opinion of the various ranks of which it is composed, and their relations to and influences upon each other. And any system of education that induced a sound taste for reading among working men would ultimately do far more for the improvement of their class than any other that has yet been tried for that purpose. In the present age

of abundant and easily-accessible literature such a taste could be readily gratified, and would lead to working men obtaining such a knowledge of the relative position and power of their class, as well as of its faults and weaknesses and the causes that produce so much want and misery in it, as would, combined with the practical knowledge which their experience gives them of the opinions, peculiarities, and tone of feeling of their own body, enable them to improve themselves more effectually than others could improve them, for there is no improvement like self-improvement. Nor will the position of the working classes as a body ever be generally and permanently elevated until they become the chiefest instruments of their own progress, and by their own successful efforts point out to those in higher ranks of life who may be willing to help them, how their auxiliary help may be most profitably applied."

"Well, there's something in that," said my father, thoughtfully.

"Something in it!" echoed the cashier. "My

dear sir, there's a very great deal in it; much more, in fact, than appears to be dreamt of in your philosophy. Knowledge, you may depend upon it, is the lever whereby the working classes will—if they ever do it—raise themselves to a better position; and reading is, in their case, an essential means of obtaining the material for their lever. To continue the mechanical analogy, I may say, that as scrap iron is among the toughest and best of all descriptions, so the general information derived from a varied course of reading is the best material for a lever of knowledge that is to be applied to raising the position of the working man—a much better material than the more costly, refined, and for many purposes really more valuable one of scholarly education would be. And yet," he went on, shrugging his shoulders, "when a boy begins to evince a taste for reading, his parents or teachers, in nine cases out of ten, immediately try to stifle it, because, forsooth, the boy wants to read fiction. If he will read 'Moral Dis-

courses for Youth,' or silly, brimstone-breathing, text-bespattered tracts, well and good, but he must not read fiction. Novels are not fit for little boys ; they are naughty books, and he must not read them, lest he be corrupted ; and so the taste for reading is either crushed out ere it has properly taken root, or the boy is driven to indulge in it secretly, and probably becomes a reader of penny numbers of ' Jack Sheppard ' or ' Dick Turpin,' and so gets his taste utterly vitiated."

" What would *you* have people do, then, in this respect ?" asked my father.

" Well," answered the cashier, " as far as experience shows, it seems to be a law of nature that boys, when they first take to read, fly to fiction, and in this impulse lies the germ which, by a little judicious cultivation, may be developed into a sound and discriminating taste for reading, and for this reason a young boy's love for the marvellous in literature ought to be *guided* and not crushed. The taste is a beneficial one in

itself, for the reading of fictitious narratives of thrilling adventure interests boys, and keeps them out of mischief while they are boys, and often fills their minds with aspirations which, though often impossible of attainment, are nevertheless of an ennobling character; and the higher class of novels which they take to a little later gives rise to a great deal of incidental reading of a more substantial character. Properly guided, the general result of this youthful taste for works of fiction would be, that those who had as boys began their reading with the 'Arabian Nights' and the 'Scottish Chiefs,' would, as men, after they had had a few such works as 'Alton Locke' and 'Mary Barton' through their hands, read political economy, and in all probability be able to deduce some principle from it that would enable them to better understand the position in society of themselves and the class to which they belong. And when the general body of the working classes once properly understand their own relative and

abstract position in the social scale, an improvement in their condition will inevitably follow."

"Then," said my father, "if a taste for fiction is a good sign, I think our Johnny is coming on well, for he's read 'Jack the Giant Killer' and 'Cinderella,' and a whole lot of them sort already."

"Well," said the cashier, "that's a very good beginning; and in the course of another year or so I'll take the liberty of presenting him with the 'Pilgrim's Progress' and 'Robinson Crusoe,' and one or two more of that kind; and when he has got through them, you can follow them up by 'Two Years Before the Mast,' 'Bruce's Travels,' and other books of voyages and travels, varied occasionally by some such novels as 'Ivanhoe' and 'The Last of the Mohicans,' and these would be as much as, with a due attention to play, he would be able to manage while at school."

My father having, by a motion of his head,

expressed a general approval of these observations, the cashier continued,

“ But mark me, Robinson, I hope that when your son does leave school, you wont make the very prevalent and disastrous mistake of looking upon his education as completed. Many working men cannot of course continue the education of their children beyond the school-house in any manner that involves additional expense ; but even men in this position might, in the present day, do something towards promoting home education among such of their boys as are at work, and who have previously received some degree of elementary education. But for it being a general idea among working men that a boy's education is finished when he walks out of school for the last time, thousands of the boys of the working classes who spend their evenings in roaming about the streets, and grow up ignorant, ill-informed, and sometimes vicious men, would be brought up in a manner that would result in their becoming intelligent,

respectable, and comparatively well - educated members of society."

" Well, if I'm alive when Johnny goes to work," said my father, " I'll take particular notice that he doesn't go raking about the streets at night."

" O, I've no doubt but that you'll look after him," said the cashier, " but at the same time you musn't keep too tight a hand upon him ; that would most likely spoil him, you know, make him scheme and tell lies, and all that sort of thing. Since you can afford it, what I would advise you to do when he starts to work is to make him a member of the Mechanics' Institution, and let him join the classes for mathematics and mechanical drawing in connexion with it. The study of these two subjects, which will be of great use to him in his trade, will occupy him two or three evenings a week, and with a taste for reading already formed, the library and reading-room of the institution will supply him with abundant means of pleasantly and profitably

spending most of his other evenings; while an occasional visit by permission to the theatre or other places of amusement will serve to give variety to his evenings' occupations and keep him from resorting to underhand expedients to obtain amusements. Such a course during his apprenticeship, combined with that practical knowledge of men and the ways of the world which, as well as a knowledge of a trade, is acquired in a workshop, would result in his becoming one of those much oftener spoken of than seen individuals—an 'intelligent artizan.' And now, Robinson," concluded the cashier, smiling, "as we have so far forecast the time as to land Johnny into manhood, I will conclude this long and, I am afraid, very dry lecture."

CHAPTER IX.

I AM SENT TO THE BOROUGH SCHOOL—MY NEW SCHOOL,
SCHOOLMATES, AND MASTERS—I MAKE SPORT FOR THE
SCHOOL PHILISTINES, AND PASS A DECIDEDLY UNPLEASANT
FIRST DAY.



HE cashier's exposition of his views upon education had an immediate and decided effect upon my father, who ere it was finished had abandoned his select academy idea, and at its conclusion emphatically expressed his intention of sending me as a pupil to the Borough school on the following Monday morning.

This resolution was duly announced to my mother, by whom it was at first very unfavourably received.

"Well, I'm sure," she said, breaking in upon my father as he was about to explain the reasons for this alteration in his intentions, "you'll send

him somewhere after a bit! A pretty chance *he'll* have among the gang that go there; a nice lot of rips *they* are for our Johnny to go among, and him straight out of a woman's school. You'll be having him coming home with his clothes all torn off his back and his head broke, or perhaps killed altogether; and then it'll be, who'd have thought it? But you wont have me to blame for it when it happens; for, mind, I've told you; and if he goes he don't go with my will, remember."

"Ah, but, my dear," said my father in a soothing tone, "don't you see it's just because he has as yet always been at a woman's school that he ought to go to a school of this kind now? You know he'll have to learn to rough it a bit like other lads, and the sooner he begins the better for himself; and as to his being knocked about, I dare say the masters and teachers will see that no great harm comes to him; though if any one should get putting on him too much I'll put a stopper on that. And then, my dear——"

“ Oh, it’s no use you ‘ my dearing ’ me ! ” again broke in my mother, who had by this time recovered her breath. “ I aint to be talked out of my seven senses like that. I know all about it ; if they don’t lame him or something worse before he’s been there a week, they’ll spoil him and make him as bad or worse than themselves. You know he was a little bad ’un before he went to Mrs. Wilson’s, and now if he’s sent among the lot as goes to the Borough school, little fault to *him*, poor lad, if he turns out a regular bad ’un altogether, and takes to swearing and fighting, and brings your grey hairs—which they will be grey in the course of time—in sorrow to the grave, as the Bible says : and if he does, don’t you blame me, mind.”

In reply to this last adjuration, my father hastened to assure her that in case such an untoward state of things as she anticipated should come to pass, he would *not* attach any blame to her, and would remember with all due credit to her prophetic powers the warnings she had given

him. And after a time, when she had so far given vent to the overcharged vials of her wrath as to be prepared to "listen to reason," he gave her an epitomised version of his friend's educational lecture; and either the cogent reasons contained in that lecture or the intimation that he "meant to have his own way whether or not," with which he concluded his abstract of it, induced her to acquiesce in the proposed change of plan and the modifications in her part of the arrangements which the change involved.

During my last six months at the infant school I had worn as my Sunday clothes a semi-highland costume, consisting of a Rob Roy tunic drawn in at the waist by a japanned leather belt, the large gilt clasp of which was conspicuously and, as my parents fondly believed, appropriately ornamented by a striking bas-relief of a fully-equipped warrior of the tobacconist's-sign clan; short linen, lace-edged drawers, between the termination of which, about the middle of my thigh, and my short tartan socks, my

at that time richly mottled legs were left exposed to the public gaze, the blasts of winter, and the horrifying attacks of hungry or frolicsome street curs ; a black cloth glengarry cap trimmed with tartan of the same pattern as my coat, and surmounted with a Brummagem silver thistle, and a pair of high-lows, ornamented with steel buckles. But when it was decided that I was to go to Harder's academy, it was at the same time resolved that this gorgeous suit, together with all my week-day clothes, should be made down for my brother, and that I should be formally jacketed and breeched. To carry out this resolve, two complete suits, one of superfine black for Sunday and the other of strong mixed cloth for school wear, were to have been ordered. But the change with respect to the class of school to which I was to go necessarily involved, with a woman of my mother's managing disposition, a change in the arrangements with regard to the proposed alteration in my style of dress. She now determined that my high-

land costume should be still retained for my own wear, and with the simple addition of a pair of leggings attached to my short drawers, converted into my school suit, while the mixed cloth suit which would have been my school dress had I gone to Harder's, was to succeed the all-tartan as my Sunday clothes.

These arrangements being final, I was on the following Monday morning arrayed in all the glory which a full suit of Rob Roy plaid (for the leggings at that time a favourite intermediate step to breeching proper, were of the same material as my tunic) could confer, and, accompanied by my mother, set out for the Borough school. This school, which was at the north-end of the town and in the centre of a poor and densely populated district, was a large two-story building, consisting of two wings fronting and having entrances from different streets. One of these wings was divided into the infants' and girls' school, the other being the boys' school, and the inner portion of the large square of which these

wings formed two sides was divided into three commodious, walled-in play-grounds, of which the boys' was the largest.

As we neared the school, which was a considerable distance from our house, we began to overtake and be overtaken by numerous bands of children, and in the stream formed by the confluence of a number of these bands we passed into the school. A teacher stationed at the door by which we entered showed us into a waiting room, in which about a dozen other boys with their mothers were already assembled, and others soon began to drop in and take their seats upon the bench on which, under the superintendence of another teacher, we were ranged to wait our turn.

Waiting your turn in a public waiting-room, whether it is that of a dentist, a statesman, or the head master of a scholastic establishment, is a very soul-depressing affair to the interested and anxious client whose fate is to be decided upon by the potentate of the presence chamber,

the way to which lies through the necessary but still purgatorial waiting-room. Whether waiting-rooms are really selected with an especial view to dreariness of aspect, or whether it is that the state of suspense existing in the minds of their occupants, combined with the plentiful lack of furniture that generally obtains in them, gives them an imaginary air of dreariness, certain it is that to those who have to wait their turn in them they appear to be the gloomiest of all possible rooms. Compared with them a lumber-room, which to a stranger would at least have something of the attraction pertaining to a cabinet of curiosities, would appear an abode of bliss to the waiting dwellers on the threshold. Children who are past the happy age when they are unconscious of any save the most direct physical dangers, but who are not yet capable of bringing philosophical reflection to their aid when placed in a trying situation or labouring under depressing influences, are, when subject to it, naturally the severest sufferers

from waiting-room fright. As I sat in the gloomy, ill-lighted, stone-floored, vault-like passage which served as ante-chamber to the committee-room of the school, this fright lay heavily upon me, and, assisted by the unpleasant ideas conjured up by the prospect of being placed as a stranger among the crowd of rough lads that I had seen entering the school, wrought me up to a high state of nervous dread. The committee-room I felt sure I would find to be a sort of chamber of horrors, presided over by an ogre, nor did the safe return from the room of my co-victims dispel this belief. It was, therefore, with fear and trembling that, when it came to my turn, I heard the monotonous and oft-repeated "Now, then, you," of the saturnine teacher who officiated as the Cerberus of the occasion. I would fain have appealed for a little time in which to screw my courage up for taking the dreaded plunge into the dragon's cave; but my mother, who, having been detained much longer than she had anticipated, was by this

time very impatient, and had twice informed me in an agitated whisper that some meat that she had left stewing would be done to rags, put me on my feet, and had me into the committee-room before I could utter a word of remonstrance.

With downcast eyes, a painful sense of burning in the face and general dizziness in the head, I found myself placed in front of a table, at the other side of which I *felt* the ogre was seated. I stretched out my hand to take hold of my mother's dress, but she was not within reach, and with a sort of confused despair I braced myself to meet my fate, and listened for the ogre's gruff fee-fo-fumish announcement that when he had once got me fairly in his power he meant to grind my bones to make his bread.

Great, therefore, was my surprise when, after a brief pause, there came from the spot which I instinctively knew to be occupied by the ogre a remarkably pleasant and much more fairy than ogre like voice, which, first flowing past me a little to the right said, "Good morning, mam,"

and then coming directly to me, "Look up, my little fellow. What! a young Highlander, and hang your head? Oh! that will never do."

Surprised and somewhat reassured by the unmistakably kind tone of this voice, I did look up; and behold! I was in, not a dragon's haunted, bone-bestrewed cavern, but what to my relieved imagination appeared to be a veritable little Eden. A glance round the room at once convinced me that in the present instance the passage through the valley of the shadow of the waiting-room had led, not to a chamber of torture or slough of despond, but to a brick-and-mortar bower of bliss. It was a light, airy apartment, about the size of an ordinary sitting-room, and was brightly but still harmoniously papered, painted, and pictured (with Scripture pieces set in richly-gilt frames), while the general cheery effect of its still-life features were materially enhanced by the ruddy glow of the fire which blazed in the grate.

But the cheerful light of the fire and the

generally paradisiacal air of the apartment were dull and almost waiting-roomish compared with the kindly genial glow that beamed from the smiling countenance of the man who, in my imagination, I had so greatly wronged by supposing him to be a child-destroying monster. He was seated in a large easy chair, with his legs under the table, so that to me, standing at the opposite side, he was only visible from the lower part of his chest upwards. The broad, firm chest, with its liberal display of snowy well-fitting shirt front, was that of a robust middle-aged man, but the face was scarcely in keeping with the rest of the bust; for though, from its being full and rather fleshy, it harmonized well enough as to mere size, its expression and general appearance was more that of a stoutishly-inclined, comely, good-humoured youth of twenty, than of the stout middle-aged gentleman which, when he stood up, it became fully apparent this kindest of schoolmasters was. Although the face was full, there was not the slightest coarse-

ness about it; its fault, if fault it was, being rather that the features were soft and regular to the degree of effeminacy: the white, polished forehead, the plump, rosy cheeks and small ripe mouth, and a singular delicacy of skin, on which there appeared no vestige either of "hirsute appendages" or the indications that usually accompany regular shaving, combining to give his countenance more of feminine beauty than masculine handsomeness. But though, from its softness and regularity, the face presented no strongly marked characteristics, its general expression was decidedly intelligent, and the bright, honest glance of the dark-blue eyes, and the magic of the smile which seemed to be constantly hovering about the lips and dimpling the chin, saved it from any charge of insipidity or inexpressiveness. In short, the face of Mr. Mayfield, the head master of the Dockington Borough Schools, was of that open, cheery type that at once inspires love and confidence in the minds of children,

who as yet reck not of worldly-wise maxims regarding the deceitfulness of appearances, and had he been made to order to fill the position he held he could not possibly have been improved.

"That's the way, my little man—hold your head up, and don't be frightened," he said encouragingly, as, after the first reassuring glance, I looked boldly round the room, and replied to his cheery smile in kind.

"He's never been to a large school before, I suppose?" he said, turning to my mother, on finding that I had banished the shyness and alarm that had overwhelmed me on first entering the room.

"No, sir," replied my mother, "he's only been at a woman's school, where the scholars were all neighbours' children, and I'm afraid he'll be very timid among so many strange boys."

"Well, naturally, at first; but he'll soon make acquaintances among his class-mates, and we'll see that no wrong comes to him. He's your own son, I can see," he went on, giving

a smiling glance at my mother's face ; " what is his name ? "

" Johnny Robinson, sir. "

" And his age ? " he asked when he had entered the name in a large book that lay before him.

" Just turned eight. "

" And what is his religion ? "

My mother was rather taken aback by this question, and hesitatingly answered, " Well, he aint any religion particular yet, sir. "

" Well, I suppose not, " said the master, with a quiet, good-humoured laugh. " I ought to have asked you if you or his father had any objection to his being brought up to the Church of England. "

" Oh, no objection whatever ; we want him to be brought up a good lad, and to go to church regular. "

" Then I suppose I may put him down for our Sunday-school ; come at half-past nine in the morning, read and have prayers till half-

past ten, and then march to St. Jude's, and come to school again in the afternoon from half-past two till four."

"Oh, yes; you may put him down, sir; it'll suit us very well, especially the half-hour later in the morning; for what with having to put the children's Sunday things on, and the master being at home, and one thing and another, you want more time on that day than any other."

"Very well, then," said the master, who had been completing the entry in his books while my mother was speaking, "I need not detain you any longer, Mrs. Robinson, as I've only got to hear your son read, and set him a class."

Thus released from further attendance, my mother bid the master good morning, kissed me, and hastened home—to find not only that the meat *was* done to rags, but also that my brother, who had not set out for school when we left the house, had nearly emptied the sugar-basin, and broken into a pot of preserves; depredations for which, I am happy to relate, he at dinner-time

underwent the righteous penalty of a good hiding, his attempt to persuade his mother that "Johnny made him do it," having upon this occasion proved an utter failure.

When my mother had taken her departure the master called me to his side, and placing a small book in my hand, and pointing to a paragraph, asked me to read it. The paragraph being a simple one, part of a "moral lesson in two syllables," I read it fluently, and without mistake, a performance which elicited from the master a commendatory, "Now come, that's very well; we'll be able to make something of you, I see!"

Having taken the book from me, he considered for a few moments, and then said—

"Well, my little highlander, I dare say you would do for the fifth class, but I think you had better go into the sixth for the present; it will be easier for you till you get into the ways of the school, as the boys in it are more about your own age, and you can be shifted to a

higher class after a time ; do you understand, Johnny ?”

“ Yes, sir,” I replied ; though beyond a vague idea, gathered more from his looks than his words, that in what he proposed he meant to be kind to me, I did *not* then understand him.

My position in my new school being thus determined, the master rapped on the table, and calling out “ sixth ” to the guardian of the waiting-room who opened the door in answer to his signal, that individual conducted me through his gloomy chamber, and opening a door that led into the school, at the same time repeating the word “ sixth,” handed me over to the teacher who was stationed at the door to receive the new boys. This youth led me across the school to one of several classes that were ranged along the far-side, and handed me over to the teacher of it, at the same time observing to him, “ this is the fifth for you this morning ; you’ll have a fine big class after a while.”

The teacher to the enlargement of whose class

I was thus contributed, was a chubby-faced, curly-headed, good-humoured boy, of about fifteen, the expression of whose countenance, more than his occasional forgetfulness, was the cause of the failure of his attempts to look severe and dignified. When I was left standing before him he eyed me all over, with a lowering of the brows and general severity of aspect that might have stamped him a descendant, in a direct line, of the great Simon Tappertit; but the smile with which he answered my bow entirely swept away the Tappertitish mask, and left him the genial, light-hearted boy that he really was.

“What’s your name, little ‘un,” he asked, coming up to me and laying his hand on my shoulder in a kindly, big-brotherly sort of way.

“Johnny Robinson, sir,” I answered.

“Oh, you mustn’t say sir to me, you know, it’s to the masters you must say that; you must say ‘yes, teacher,’ and ‘no, teacher,’ to me; do you see?”

“Yes, teacher,” I replied.

"Aye, that's it," said he; "now I'll show you the lesson; here you are, see," and giving me the book he held in his hand, he pointed out the place to which the lesson had progressed at the moment of my entering the class. "Each one," he continued, "reads a sentence in his turn, and if he makes any mistakes, the one below him who corrects him takes his place; so you see, if you keep your eye on your book, and look sharp, you soon get up; but you must go to the bottom now, you know, that's fair, last come go to the bottom, so take your place; but mind you don't get talking or making a noise, or else I'll have to put you on the line, and then you'll get the cane."

This "inaugural address" being concluded, I took my place at the bottom of the class, and the teacher turning round, resumed his suspended dignity of manner, and sternly called out "Silence, you Smith, that's twice I've caught you talking this morning; but the third time pays for all, mind; and if I catch you again,

on the line you go, and then you know what's in store for you. Mr. Ashplant's in charge this morning, mind you."

The rebuked Master Smith suddenly became intently interested in his book, and tried hard, but unsuccessfully, to look unconscious, as it was evident that the fear of Mr. Ashplant, and what that gentleman might have in store for youths who should be placed upon the line, was upon him. Turning from the now-blushing Smith, the teacher, still in his Simon Tappertit manner, called out "Go on;" and in obedience to this command, one of the boys a little on the bottom side of the middle of the class, resumed the reading lesson at the point at which it had been broken off by my entrance upon the scene.

For a few minutes I obeyed the teacher's injunction to keep my eye on my book; but the desire to take stock of my situation proving stronger than the feeling of obedience, I soon began to look around me, at first furtively, and

then, in the forgetfulness engendered by the novelty of the scene, undisguisedly and staringly. My first half-concealed glances, stolen over the top of the book, were naturally directed to my class-mates, many of whom I found were returning the compliment, by directing their critical glances on me. What their impressions regarding me might have been I cannot say; but the general result of my survey of them was by no means satisfactory or reassuring. We were formed into three sides of a square; the teacher occupying the fourth side, and with the wall at his back, had all his scholars pretty well under his eye. The class consisted of about forty boys, ranging from a big, overgrown, gawky youth of fourteen, who was head and shoulders taller than the teacher, to stunted, sickly children of seven. Some of them were cleanly and neatly dressed, and were evidently the children of tidily-inclined, thrifty, and probably comparatively well-to-do parents; but the appearance of the majority of them was slovenly and unwholesome, com-

pared with that of the well-cared-for children with whom I had been accustomed to associate at Mrs. Wilson's. The looped and windowed, and at the same time dirty raggedness of some of them, and their clouted shoon, and in two or three instances bare feet, grated terribly upon my sense of juvenile gentility; while their streety, self-possessed air was unpleasantly suggestive of my case being that of the proverbial weak pitcher, should I happen to be brought into collision with them. My cursory examination of my class-mates being concluded, I allowed my gaze to wander farther afield. The school-room was a large and lofty building, flag-floored and heavy-roofed, but still bright and cheerful, owing to the flood of light that poured into it through the numerous large windows with which on both sides, and throughout its entire length, it was fitted. At the upper end a raised platform stretched across the room. On this platform were three desks, the large centre one being that of Mr. Mayfield, the head master, who

being one of those men to whom children naturally take, was a universal favourite with the boys, who—an unparalleled circumstance in my experience—always spoke of him, even among themselves, as *Mr.* His general kindness, his patient investigation, and even-handed justice in cases of appeal, and his *understood* aversion to corporal punishment, except as a last resource, had gained the respect of the scholars, who were wont to enthusiastically declare that *he* was something like a master, *he* was the sort, and so forth. And sometimes in their fervour, forgetting his interests, they would wish that he was a second or third master, that he might be in a more direct connexion with them than he was in his present position, which was that of a general superintendent of the whole establishment. The desk to the right belonged to the second master, Mr., otherwise “Cockey Handy” Ashplant, a gentleman solely remarkable for the severity and gusto with which he used the cane, without which he was rarely

seen in school, and which, it was popularly said, he was in the habit of taking to bed with him. The left-hand desk was apportioned to the junior master, Mr. Reeves, commonly spoken of as Napoleon Reeves, from his frequently undertaking the character of the great Corsican, in the popular playground performance of French and English. He was immensely popular with the boys, not only because he spared the cane, and often took an active part in French and English, Prison Bars, and other favourite sports of the playground, but also because he was a capital story-teller, and would, when taking a class, largely illustrate his theme by tales and anecdotes, which though in many instances—as I know now—apocryphal, were none the less charming or instructive. And lastly, though not leastly, because it was generally supposed that the pedantic and abhorred Ashplant was envious of his popularity among the boys, whom he could keep in order more effectually than could Ashplant, flog he never so vigorously.

Down the centre of the school-room ran the writing-desks, each capable of accommodating about twenty scholars, the spaces between the desks and the walls on either side being occupied by the classes that were receiving such lessons as were given standing. Eight classes were formed in these spaces, the class of which I was a unit being the bottom one on the left side.

Outside their respective classes stood the unfortunate beings who for various high crimes and misdemeanours had been "put on the line." While gazing upon those of them on our side of the school, I observed a sudden change for the worse come over their already woe-begone visages, and following the direction of their appalled glances, I beheld descending a flight of stairs that led from the class-rooms a long-haired, puffy-faced, heavy-browed individual, carrying a long cane, who, from the significant manner in which the teacher had mentioned his name, I immediately and rightly guessed to be the redoubted Mr. Ashplant. On catching

sight of his victims, several of whom were already whining, he began to flourish his cane in an ominous manner, and seeing the first unfortunate about to speak as he swept down upon him, he roared out,

“Oh, none of your excuses, sir, hold out your hand ;” and immediately brought the cane down on the extended hand with a stinging crack that sent a sympathetic and simultaneous thrill of horror throughout the line of the doomed.

“Come, hold it out again,” shouted Ashplant, waxing wrath at what he evidently considered a most ungrateful hesitation upon the part of the boy to hold out his now tingling palm to receive the remaining cuts that were to make up the tale of his punishment ; and in obedience to this command, supplemented by an intimation that it would be worse for him if he was any longer about it, the victim once more extended his hand and received two more cracking strokes, the sound of which sent another visible thrill through many of those who were to suffer, while

their smart sent their recipient to his class howling and wringing his hand.

Having thus got a fair start, Mr. Ashplant, with the ease and rapidity that constant practice gives, disposed of the remainder of his victims, who took their punishment with various degrees of fortitude. Some who were either case-hardened or who had resolved to suffer and be strong, in order to deprive their enemy of the pleasure which any expression of suffering upon their part evidently afforded him, bore it unmurmuringly and unflinchingly, while others howled and writhed most dismally.

While I had been observing these details of structure and discipline I had entirely forgotten my book, but at this point I was abruptly recalled to a sense of my position by the teacher calling out in his sternest voice, "Now, then, you new boy, Robinson ! it's your turn ; go on." I glanced helplessly and confusedly at the book, without having the remotest idea at what point of the lesson I ought to on, and was about to

confess as much when the boy next to me kindly whispered, "And thus the long summer days;" and happening at the same instant to get my eye on the sentence beginning with those words, I was happily enabled to go on and save myself from a confession that might have led to my being handed over to the tender mercies of Mr. Ashplant.

"That'll do," said the teacher, when I had read my sentence; "but mind you don't get staring about you again and losing the place, or else you'll have to go on the line, and then you'll get what you saw those boys getting just now, and you won't like that, I fancy."

Thus admonished, I took care to be as attentive as possible to the progress of the lesson, and soon perceived that I could read as well as any and better than many of my classmates. Before the lesson had got quite half way round I had an opportunity of correcting one of the readers, and the correction being duly verified I was ordered to "take him down;" that was, to

take the place in the class next above him. When the little stir caused by the change of places had subsided, my taken-down classmate,—a bare-footed, scantily-clad, sallow-complexioned, and decidedly cheeky-looking boy, a little taller and a year older than myself,—holding his book so as to screen his face, asked me in a fierce whisper what I had got taking him down for.

I whispered back that teacher had told me to correct anybody that made a mistake, if I saw a chance.

“Well, never you mind what *teacher* told you,” he said, in the same low tone; “if you get taking me down any more, *I’ll* tell you something you wont like, with a peg on the nose. You aint agoin to come it over me, mind you, if you have got your Sunday clothes on.”

“They arn’t my Sunday clothes,” I proudly replied; “I shall have a new suit on Sunday.”

“Oh, dear, no! they aint your Sunday clothes, not at all! I suppose I haven’t seen you with ’em on of a Sunday; oh dear a-me, no!”

Either awed by the teacher's cry of "silence there!" or imagining that it would not be possible for me to bear more of such biting sarcasm and survive, he became silent for a brief space, after giving expression to the ironical allusions to my clothes, and when he resumed his whispering it was in a more friendly tone.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

"No," I answered.

"Oh, I know you," he said; "I live next street to you, and I see you when I come to the bakehouse at the top of your street."

Oh," I said, and then thinking that these monosyllabic replies might be considered uncourteous, I asked, "Why do you come to school in your bare feet?"

"Why, because I've only got one pair of shoes, and they're at the mending this week; that's why, soft head," was the answer.

"Don't you wash them when you go to bed?" I asked, looking down at the dirt-engrained appearance of his feet.

“ Oh, sometimes,” he replied, carelessly ; “ but what’s the use of washing ’em when it’s only dry dirt ?”

Here our whispered conversation was brought to a close by the teacher coming round to collect the books previous to questioning us on the lessons we had been reading. In the course of the questioning, Mickey Bryan—for such I found was the name of the boy with whom I had been whispering—was still further taken down, and seemed in a fair way of reaching the bottom of the class, when the questioning was brought to an abrupt termination by the ringing of a bell. This bell was the summons to the playground, the signal of liberty for the next quarter of an hour, and at its first tinkle all became confusion. The classes in the schoolroom broke up, those who had been occupying the class-rooms came whooping downstairs, with Ashplant in their midst shouting silence, and slashing right and left with his cane, and all joined in a rush through the doors that led into the playground.

Shrinking from this to me appalling stampede, I was one of the last to reach the playground, and the scene which it presented when I got into it seemed to me perfectly demoniac. Two large revolving swings with twelve ropes each were fully occupied, some of the ropes being manned by two boys, and were going round at a pace that made me dizzy to behold. Prison bars and leap frog were already in active operation; and the school having, in company with a number of other schools, been treated to a large circus that had been visiting the town the previous week, acrobatic performances were for the time being in great favour. Numbers of the boys were standing on their heads, climbing on to each other's shoulders, turning wheels, and indulging in other exercises that seemed to me to be certain to end fatally, and to be the sport of demons rather than boys. Boys singly or in bodies were rushing wildly about with no apparent object, whilst others were struggling upon the ground, a seemingly inextricable mass

of arms and legs, and all, however otherwise engaged, were shouting and yelling at the top of their voices, the whole combining to make a scene of Babel-like noise and confusion that caused me to shrinkingly take up my position in an obscure angle of the wall at what appeared to be the least frequented end of the playground. For a minute or two I remained unobserved in my comparatively calm retreat, and began to hope that I would find peace where there was no peace. But presently, while I was gazing with a sort of dizzy admiration at the performers on the nearest swing, a cap fell at my feet, and was instantly followed by the appearance of Mickey Bryan, attended by a howling band, who had been using the cap as a football.

“ Oh, my !” cried Mickey, in a voice of ecstasy, as his eye fell upon me, “ if here aint mammy daddy sugar baby as took me down this morning. Aint we fine in our Sunday clothes ! He says they aint his Sunday ’uns, as if I hadn’t

seen him with 'em on many a time. Have a look at him, lads," he continued, laying hold of me by the scruff of the neck, and turning me round in order to give his followers a proper look at the curiosity he had discovered for them. "I dare say he thinks to come it over us with his white collars and fancy cap, but he'll find himself mistaken; wont he, lads?"

The lads unanimously and emphatically expressed their opinion that he *just would*, and one of them at that moment happening to notice that, while they had been engaged with me, the owner of the cap that they had been kicking had managed to regain it, Mickey instantly snatched mine off my head, and, followed by his friends, set off, kicking it before them. I ran after them for some time, asking them to give me back my cap, and trying to snatch it from among them, but finding all my efforts fruitless, and having been twice knocked down by coming into collision with other boys, I retired in despair to my

corner, where, after a while, Mickey brought the cap back to me.

"It aint much worse," he said, placing it on my head; "so mind you don't get telling teacher."

"Ah! but I will tell him," I replied.

"Well, you'd better not," said Mickey, "for if you do, look here," and brandishing his fists in my face, he intoned, with great solemnity of voice and manner—

"That's iron, and that's steel,
And that's the fist that'll make you feel."

"Now will you tell teacher?"

"No," I faintly answered.

Only half convinced by this answer, Master Bryan observed: "Well, it wont be good for your health if you do; it'll be sudden death or a long sickness for you, I can tell you. For," he continued, resuming his incantatory strain, and again shaking his fists in my face,

"That's iron, and that's lead,
And that's the fist that'll knock you dead."

"But I wont tell," I said, appalled by these terrible threats.

Still Mickey, who was evidently hard of belief, was not quite convinced, and was opening his mouth probably with the intention of threatening me with some punishment compared with which knocking me dead would be a mild proceeding, in case of my telling teacher, when at that instant the bell rang for re-entering the school, and he left me. But during the geography lesson that occupied our class for the remainder of the morning, I several times caught his eye ominously fixed upon me, and directing me to observe his pantomimic performance of the cabalistic rites embodying the threat to annihilate me should I be guilty of telling tales *in* school. At twelve o'clock the bell releasing us for the hour and a half set apart as dinner-time was rung, and with a noise and confusion greater, if possible, than that which had characterized their rush to the playground, the scholars cleared out of the school.

"Well, Johnny, my dear, and how do you like your new school?" eagerly asked my mother, pausing in her cooking operations as I walked into the house.

"I don't like it at all," I answered petulantly, "and I shan't go back to it any more;" and then I recounted, with a little heightening of colour, the occurrences in the playground.

"Well, I'm sure," exclaimed my mother, "the nasty, dirty little wretches, to go and knock you down and take your cap and kick it about—that *is* coming it. I wonder what next. But they shan't do it for nothing—that they shan't. I'll go straight to the master about it to-morrow morning."

"Don't send me back again; that'll be the best," I suggested.

"Oh, you must go back for to-day out anyway," said my mother; "but I'll see how you get on in the afternoon, and what your father says about it at night."

And so having had my dinner I set out on

my return for school, heavy at heart, the gift of an extra piece of tart and a halfpenny wherewith to get myself something on the road notwithstanding.

On the ringing of the bell at half-past one the classes were formed in the playground, and, headed by their respective teachers, marched into school in Indian file. Ours was one of the half-dozen classes stationed in the desks for a writing lesson. The desks and the forms, which served as the seats to them, were secured from shaking by their iron legs being firmly leaded into the stone floor, and were consequently fixtures. The flat surface of the desks were abundantly ornamented with initials, names, and pictorial designs done in the well-known pocket-knife style of engraving generally affected by schoolboys. There being no taking down in the writing lessons, many of the boys claimed those parts of the desks on which they had placed their mark, a circumstance that led to some wrangling, and such whisperings as

"I'll give you a peg in the ear if you don't shift;" "I'll let you know who's place it is;" "I'll give you a good warming when we get into the playground." But Mr. Ashplant having detected a couple of these "junior wranglers" kicking each other's shins under the desks, administered condign punishment to them in a style that struck terror into and silenced the rest. When all were seated, the teachers brought round books, copy slips, and pens to those who were in copy-books. The inkstands were let into the desks, and when not in use the frameless slates were also let down into slits, their bottom ends resting on a ledge running under the desks. At a word of command from Ashplant, those "on slates"—of whom I was one—drew their slates from their slits, and, being supplied with pencil-cases, prepared for action. The slate copies were set by the teachers, my exercise being to multiply large-hand copies of the word "And" all down both sides of the slate. The boy on my right hand, who, like

myself, was on slates, being an expeditious writer, had filled both sides of his slate while I had yet several lines of my first side to fill, and finding himself at liberty, and anxious to improve the occasion, he whispered to me—

“ I say, let’s have a talk.”

“ I have not half filled my slate yet,” I whisperingly replied.

“ Oh, never mind, you’re a new boy ; they’ll say nothing to you the first day. Do you know any riddles ?”

“ No,” I answered, going on with my writing.

“ Oh, I do, lots,” he said, heedless of the coldness of my reply ; “ I’ll give you one.

“ There was a man of Adam’s race,
He had a certain dwelling-place,
Neither in heaven, or earth, or hell.
Can you tell me where that man could dwell,
Sheltered in, and covered o’er,
Where never man had been before ?”

There, can you tell me that ?”

“ No,” I answered.

"Will you give it up, then?"

"Yes."

"Why, it's Jonah in the whale's belly, to be sure. Don't you see?"

"Ay, I see," I answered.

"Well, I'll give you another.

"There was a man rode through this town,
Great Grissel was his name;
His saddle-bow was gilt with gold:
Three times I've told you his name."

You can guess that, can't you?"

I shook my head.

"What! can't guess that; well, you are a softy. Why, that's a regular easy one. His name was *Was*, don't you see; he rode through the town of Great Grissel *Was* his name. Now, I'll give you a hard one?"

But before he could proceed to do so he was seized from behind by the ever-vigilant Ashplant, and there being several former convictions against him for talking, he was condemned to receive three cuts on each hand. The cuts were given in

Ashplant's best style, and sent my companion back to his seat crying and with his hands squeezed between his knees, and all desire for riddle-propounding effectually driven out of his head for the time being. The writing lesson lasted an hour, and then Mr. Ashplant went round to examine the copy-books and administer his universal remedy—the cane—to all whose books showed blots, mistakes, or other imperfections. Those on slates were, happily, not subjected to this ordeal, their work being examined by the teachers.

The inspection being concluded, the copy-books, copy slips, pens, and pencils were collected, and the slates returned to their slits at the word of command, and then all being in readiness, the play-bell was rung, and the usual pell-mell rush into the playground ensued. Again the ground seemed to me a pandemonium, and again I shrank into a corner, from which I was again speedily unearthed by Mickey Bryan and his demon crew.

"Here he is, lads," shouted Mickey, whose quick eye was the first to discover my whereabouts. "Come along, mammy-daddy," he shouted, jerking me into the midst of his followers. "I suppose you think you're to be above playing with us, do you? But we'll show you different."

"Oh, my eye! what's them?" cried one of the gang, breaking in unceremoniously upon his leader's speech, and pointing to the polished buckles in my shoes; and in an instant half-a-dozen of them were on their knees and struggling to get at the buckles.

In the thick of the struggle one of the tartan leggings slightly attached to my drawers came off, leaving my bare calf exposed to view. This incident was received with delighted yells of laughter, and, springing to their feet, the gang started to chevy me round the ground, and others joining them on seeing the capital nature of the sport, I was soon chased by a large mob, joyously singing as a hunting chorus:—

“Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John,
One legging off, and one legging on.”

This sport was continued till within a minute or two of the time for going into school, and then Mickey, who, with the legging stuck on his cap, was acting as huntsman-in-chief, brought it to a close, and having collected a number of pins from his followers, proceeded, with the aid of two assistant dressers, to attach the legging to my drawers again, at the same time threatening me with the most terrific vengeance should I tell teacher. Our lesson, on re-assembling in school, was arithmetic, the sums being chalked on a black board by teacher and copied by us on to our slates. During the lesson Mickey Bryan, having been repeatedly detected, and in vain reproved, for trying to copy the answers from his neighbours' slates, was at last put on the line, where he was speedily pounced upon by Ashplant, who recognising him as an old offender, gave him a stinging half-dozen on the hands, and then calling him back as he was returning to his class,

gave him three additional cuts for muttering to himself. But notwithstanding that, Mickey, who took his punishment without a whimper, pretty audibly muttered, as he passed to his place, "I'll be one in for Cocky yet, see if I don't." At the conclusion of the lesson Ashplant mounted the platform and gave out the words of a hymn, which was sung by the boys with very good effect. He then read a prayer, at the conclusion of which, it being then four o'clock, we were dismissed ; and so ended my first, and, upon the whole, unpleasant day in the Borough School.

CHAPTER X.

I FIND A FRIEND AND PROTECTOR, AND DISCOVER THAT MICKEY BRYAN IS NOT SO BAD AS I WAS INCLINED TO PAINT HIM—I TAKE PART IN THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO AND OTHER PLAYGROUND GAMES, AND ALTOGETHER CHANGE MY OPINION RESPECTING THE SCHOOL.



T night I related all that had befallen me to my father, and again suggested that I should not be sent back to the school, a suggestion which, on hearing the adventure of the legging, my mother strongly seconded, observing that such a lot of young racapelts would be the death of me. But to this proposition my father would not listen. He couldn't see that there was anything particular the matter with me; lads would be lads, and I must learn to rough it out like the rest and take my own part; we should only see how apprentices got served out when they first went to work and then we

might talk. At any rate, I mustn't leave till I'd given it a fair trial, and in the meantime he'd see about getting some of his mates' sons who were used to the school to look after me a bit. My staying at the school being thus decided upon I was sent disconsolately to bed, where I fell asleep and dreamt of Mickey Bryan and his satellites, Mickey himself appearing in the shape of a tremendously enlarged copy of the three-headed giant, whose highly coloured likeness formed the frontispiece to my penny edition of "Jack the Giant-killer." Suffering under the depressing effects of this unwelcome visitation, I again on the following morning objected to being sent to school, but was informed that my father had left strict injunctions that I was to be packed off, and accordingly packed off I was.

There was a tacitly understood arrangement between the second and third masters to "take charge" on alternate days. Taking charge consisted in exercising a general supervision over the classes in the large school-room, dealing

with those who were put on the line, arbitrating between teachers and pupils, and attending to others matters of that kind. The master not in charge devoted himself more especially to the two or three classes in the class-rooms, testing their progress, deciding whether or not they were to be advanced to higher rules or lessons, or whether any of the boys were fit to be promoted to higher classes. In accordance with this arrangement, Mr. Reeves was in charge on this second morning, and it was he who marshalled us in the playground, 'marched us into school, and gave out the hymn, and read the prayer which opened the proceedings of the day.

At the conclusion of the prayer the school-room door, which during these devotional exercises had been closed and guarded, was opened, and the late comers to the number of about a score, were admitted and marshalled in front of the platform. The few of them who had brought notes of excuse or apology from

their parents presented them, while the rest nerved themselves to receive the two cuts which were the regulation wages of the sin of this the earlier stage of late coming, the punishment being increased according to the enormity of the offence in the cases of those who came still later.

The punishment of the late arrivals was properly the work of the master in charge, but Mr. Ashplant had broken down this arrangement by regularly volunteering his valuable services on the days when he was not in charge. And Mr. Reeves having subsequently imitated the example of his colleague on this point, with the humane intention, as the boys readily divined, of giving some of the condemned the opportunity of profiting by his avowedly milder style of punishment, the caning of those who from creeping like snails unwillingly to school or some other cause, in explanation of which no note from parents or guardians was forthcoming, had got too late, had become the joint work of Messrs. Ashplant and Reeves.

Having read the notes of excuse and passed their fortunate bearers, the masters brought out their canes and prepared for the work of castigation. In the meantime the boys were struggling and scrambling to get to Mr. Reeves' end of the platform, but the efforts of many of them were of no avail, for when a line of victims were to be operated upon, Ashplant was a terrifically expeditious performer, and flogged at nearly double the rate of the milder-mannered Reeves. On this occasion his sharp stinging cuts and the howl by which they were almost invariably followed were heard with a frequency that must have sounded ominous to those who were in the habit of getting late. Among those who passed through his hands on this morning was Mickey Bryan, who came into the class wringing his hands and again threatening vengeance against "Cocky."

The flogging being over, Ashplant betook himself and his cane to the class-room, and a calmer and happier aspect reigned over the schoolroom

under the benignant charge of the younger and more genial master. There were certainly a greater number of boys put on the line than had been the case on the previous day, as the teachers had now less hesitation about making a boy "stand out" than they had when they knew that by doing so they consigned him to the merciless Ashplant, and the boys themselves begged less hard, and consequently less successfully, not to be put out than they did when the fear of their terrible foe was before their eyes. But though the number of boys placed on the line was greater than it had been the day before, the punishment administered was less.

Excuses were now listened to, and some of the boys were acquitted of the offences laid to their charge, and others dismissed with a caution, while the punishment given was of a light kind; so light, indeed, that Mickey Bryan, who received two doses during the time of the first lesson, seemed to consider it rather a good joke than otherwise. But still Reeves showed that he *could*

flog in a style that speedily would take all notions of joking out of those who were receiving the castigation, for it having been proved that a boy who strongly accused another of having stolen some sticks of slate pencil from a cupboard in which they were kept, was himself the thief, he thrashed him in a style that Ashplant might have envied, but could scarcely hope to have excelled.

With the painful recollections of the treatment I had experienced the day before fresh in my memory, it was with great reluctance that I entered the playground on the ringing of the bell at eleven o'clock. On entering the ground, however, I was cheered by seeing Mickey Bryan engaged on one of the swings and hearing him emphatically telling a boy who asked him how long he was going to be with the rope, that he intended to stick to it all the time. Having heard this welcome intelligence I retired into a corner, hoping to be left in peace. But the hope was a vain one, for I had not been many

minutes in my retreat before I was discovered by a portion of the band who had persecuted me the day before.

“Why here’s mammy-daddy again, lads,” said one of them, a vicious-looking customer with a cast in his eyes, dragging me out of the corner; “let’s pull his legging off and chase him again.”

“O, don’t do that, please,” I urged; “I shall be knocked down and hurt if you do.”

“Well, then, what will you give us to let you alone?” he asked, shaking me.

“I haven’t got anything,” I meekly answered.

“O, that be blowed,” he said, giving me another shake; “turn your pockets out.”

I obeyed this command, and produced two pieces of twine, some marbles, a piece of toffee, and the peg of a peg-top, the wooden part of which had been demolished at the favourite peg-top game of “conquerors.”

“Hand over,” said my enemy, anticipating

obedience to his command by abruptly seizing these sundries.

But there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, and before this school brigand could complete the act of possession by pocketing his booty, his ring of followers was broken through, he was seized by the collar, a clenched fist was shaken under his nose, and a voice exclaimed in a threatening tone, "And just *you* hand over again, Mr. Morris, or I'll hand you one in the mouth as 'll make you jump."

And it was only by extraordinary promptness in handing over again that Mr. Morris saved himself from the "one in the mouth" which was about to follow, or rather conclude the command.

"Now cut it, the lot of you," said my champion, turning upon those of the group who had not slunk off while their leader was being tackled; "cut it, or it'll be worse for you, for I can lick any of you lot, I fancy; or if I can't, I can soon get some one that can, so you hadn't

better get putting on him any more none of you, or else you'll get wax for it, so I tell you."

At the conclusion of this address, which was delivered in a very warlike manner, all save one of my persecutors took themselves off, and this last one after muttering something about some people being too fast and thinking themselves everybody, but that such people would perhaps find themselves mistaken when it came to the put to, followed his companions on my protector turning up his cuffs and asking him, with an unmistakable significance of manner, "whether *he* wanted anything."

My gallant rescuer was a stout, well-developed boy, about ten years of age. He had a broad, fat, rosy face, with a nose and mouth plump but disproportionately small, and black, beady, sparkling eyes, and his irregularity of features, the merry twinkle of his eyes, and a joyous grin hovering about the corners of his mouth, ready at the slightest provocation to expand into a

boisterously mirthful laugh, gave a pleasantly comic expression to his countenance.

"Come on, Johnny," he said, taking me by the hand, when he had got rid of my assailants; "let us walk about a bit."

"Do you know me, then?" I asked, beginning to walk down the playground by his side.

"Yes," he answered; "but I expect you don't know me. I'm Billy Butcher; I live in the same street as you, two courts lower down, and my father works in the same shop as yours. I know your father," he went on, "'cos he mended my hoop for me one Saturday, when I was taking father's dinner to the shop; and last night he comes to our house just as I was a-going to bed, and he says to me, 'Billy,' he says, 'my lad went to your school yesterday, and it seems some of them's been mauling him a bit. I wish you would just keep your eye on him till he gets into the ways of the school; he doesn't know anyone there yet.' And I said I

would; and I will too, Johnny; watch if I don't." And then, lowering his tone, which he had considerably heightened when giving me the last assurance, he added, "he gave me sixpence all for myself, and I'm going to buy bamboo with it, to make bows and arrows with, and I'll give you one when they're made."

I thanked him for his intended present, and then he went on,

"But you mustn't get being soft, and sticking up in corners by yourself, and being frightened of everybody. You must join in the games; and of course you'll get knocked about a bit sometimes, 'cos we all do, but you mustn't mind that. Though if any of them gets regular putting on you—prigging your things, you know, or the like of that—just you come and tell me, and if I don't warm them as does it, it aint no matter; or if they're above my match, I'll get somebody else to do it, so it's all the same. Only mind you, Johnny," he said, emphasizing his remark by shaking his forefinger, "the more pluckier

you are, the more they wont put upon you."

To this advice I replied in effect that I would be very glad to play with any of my schoolmates who would let me play with them, that for such rough usage as came fairly in the way of play I did not care, that I would "fight my own size" if he would see me fair play, and that in case I was put upon by those who were more than my size, I would appeal to him for advice or assistance.

"That's your sort, Johnny!" he exclaimed, when I had finished speaking; "you'll do after a while. And now tell us what class you're in."

"The sixth," I answered.

"O, my! are you though?" he exclaimed, evidently surprised. "Why, I'm only in the fifth."

"Well," I said, "I think I ought to have been put in the fifth class, too, by rights. Mr. Mayfield said he thought I might have done for

it, and I know I can read better than a good many in the sixth."

" Ah, you see, Johnny, you don't know what's good for you yet," observed Billy, philosophically. " Mr. Mayfield never puts a new lad in the fifth without he's a big 'un or a regular hard 'un ; 'cos why? Why, just that our teacher's a regular crabbed 'un. You can see he walks lame, from one leg being shorter than the other, and he's always a-poking that stick of his into your ribs, or a-hitting you over the knuckles with it, and a-bullying of you all day long. And then, if you tells any of the masters—'cos, you know, no teacher is allowed to hit a boy—he says, quite innocent like, ' Why, sir, I merely touched him ;' and then he has it in for you, and puts you on the line when you aint done nothing. So, you see, there's no getting any hold of him ; but Mr. Mayfield knows him, and is down on him, for all that, and that's why he don't care about putting new lads into our class."

In reply to this, I stated that now the matter was explained, I was thankful for a kindness that I had been beginning to consider an act of injustice; and then Billy, pointing to a knot of those from whose clutches he had rescued me, and whom he had observed watching us, said,—

“If any of them gets on with you again, tell me, that’s all.”

“I will,” I said; “but there’s a worse than any of them—Mickey Bryan, in our class.”

“O no, he aint,” said Billy, rather sharply. “Mickey is a great pal of mine, and a reg’lar stunner he is too. There aint no gammon about *him*; he might have a bit of a lark with you, but you wouldn’t catch *him* a-trying to prig your things off you; or do anything else that’s shabby. You’ll be all right with Mickey, when I tell him that you know me. I’ll wait for you when we go out,” he hastily added, as the bell sounded for returning into school; “and we’ll go home along with Mickey, and then you’ll see he’s a first-rater.”

In accordance with this arrangement, I found Billy waiting outside the gate at twelve o'clock.

"Come along, Johnny," he said; "let us look sharp; Mickey's always out among the first, and he's gone on." And taking hold of me by the arm as we spoke, we started off on the trot, Billy glancing at the various groups of our schoolmates that we overtook, until, coming up to one in which there were several of those who had been most active in persecuting me, he stopped, and asked, "Where's Mickey?"

"O, he's snacked a ring," answered one of them, carelessly; "and he's run on ahead."

"Well, we wont see him now," said Billy to me, slackening his pace so as to fall behind the group; "but never mind, we'll see him in the playground."

"What's snacking a ring, Billy?" I asked.

"Why, don't you know?" he exclaimed, in a tone of surprise. "It's nailing the marbles off a ring as other chaps is playing in."

"But isn't that stealing?" I said.

"Stealing!" echoed Butcher, in a voice made shrill with mingled astonishment and indignation. "Stealing! well, I should say not. Not when you call out 'snacks,' anyway," he added, after a pause, during which he had evidently been considering the matter in this, to him, novel light. "Why," he went on, changing his voice,—the flexibility and expressiveness of which enabled him to show those shades of thought and feeling of which, from its chronic and unchangeably comic expression, his countenance was incapable of giving any indication,—to a tone that combined a sense of injury with a desire to expostulate, "Why, when a fellow's skinned, and aint got any money to buy more with, what's he to do? Snack, to be sure; what else? Why," he added, as a clincher, and as though the assertion at once and for ever decided that snacking a ring was a perfectly honest and indeed highly commendable performance, "*I often snack.*"

"But what do the boys say, that you snack from?"

"Well, you see, it's no catching, no having, at snacks; but if they *do* catch you, they don't *say* much. They give you a good hammering, and take the marbles from you again, that's all."

"Did you ever get caught?" I asked, beginning to take a deeper interest in Billy's disclosures.

"Twice," he answered briefly.

"And did you catch it?" I questioned persistently.

"Oh, didn't I just; my poor head and ribs know all about that; but that was when I first began, they don't catch me now, I'm too downy for that. I'll show you how it's done before we get home," he continued, after a moment's reflection, "for I got skinned of all but my taw last night; and you know, I told you, I want that sixpence as your father gave me to buy bamboo, so I *must* snack from somebody."

The desired opportunity for snacking was not long in presenting itself.

"You see them," said my companion, as a

turn in the road brought us in sight of a number of boys engaged in that particular game of marbles known as ring-taw.

"Yes," I answered.

"Well," said Billy, "you watch if they've got a tidy stake on ; I'll snack their ring when I get up to them, so I'll leave you now, 'cos, don't you see, if they thought you was with me they would hammer you when they couldn't catch me. But get back soon from dinner, and I'll see you in the playground before we go into school, and let you know how I got on."

So saying he went in advance, gliding quickly and quietly along, and keeping well under the shadow of the dead wall which bordered that part of the road. He was right among the players before they were conscious of his unwelcome presence, and though when they did become aware of it they knew him, and more than suspected his predatory design, their attempt to save their marbles was made too late. Uttering his war-cry, "Snacks," Billy, with a hawk-like

swiftness, darted at the ring, and clearing it at one fell swoop, took to his heels, and got such a start, owing to the confusion caused by his sudden appearance and evil proceedings, that when his despoiled victims, recovering from their surprise, did start in pursuit, they had no chance of capturing him.

They were returning from their fruitless chase, threatening to "lay in wait for and warm that there Billy Butcher," when I passed them; and I may mention that they did lay in wait for him, but had no opportunity of warming him, as for some days afterwards Billy went to and from school accompanied by a strong body-guard, under the command of the bold Mickey Bryan.

I got back to school about a quarter past one—half-past being the time at which the bell rang for reassembling—and met Butcher in the playground. He informed me that the ring that he had snacked was a pretty good one, as he had got five "stonies" and eight "clayies" out of it, a number which he said would be sufficient

to set him up again, as he found snacked marbles very lucky. He also informed me that in the afternoon play-time it was intended to have a great game of French and English, in order to fight out the battle of Waterloo, that had been left unfinished on the previous Tuesday. Napoleon Reeves was to sustain his previous character, and the Duke of Wellington was to be impersonated by John Perkins, *alias* "Long-legged John," the teacher of the first class. Billy himself was going to be a Frenchman, and offered to look after me if I chose to fight on their side, or to warm me if I liked to fight for the English.

At this point our conversation was broken off by a boy coming to ask Billy to have a game at "Pillar the Fox out of his Den," a proposition to which he acceded, on condition that I too should play. The condition was immediately granted; and under the guidance of my friend and protector, I proudly proceeded to play my first game with my new schoolmates.

In this game the players place their caps on

the ground, with about a yard and a half between each cap. Up and down this line each player in his turn has to hop once, twice, or thrice, according to the length of the line, and then back to his own cap, which, without putting down the raised foot or touching the ground with his knees, he must pick up with his teeth, and jerk right over his head behind him. Any who in trying to do this brings both his feet to the ground, touches any of the caps with either foot, fails to pick up his cap in the prescribed manner, or to fairly and clearly jerk it behind, is "foxed." He is then pillared—that is, thrashed by the other players with their caps—to some mark fixed upon as a den, generally from fifty to eighty yards off, and back again to the starting place. On reaching the den the fox is allowed a minute law, in order to take breath and prepare for the run back. But if, as generally happens, he shows a reluctance to leave his city of refuge after the minute of grace has expired, the pillarers sing in chorus—

“Two, four, six, eight, ten,
Pillar the fox out of his den.”

If he then fails to start they sing—

“One, two, three, four, five,
Kill a fox alive, kill a fox alive!”

and set to work to pillar him, whether he runs or not. As the fox usually gets a bit of a start while the others are picking up their caps, he will, if he be a good runner, sometimes be able to reach the den untouched, and may even get over the return journey with a comparatively slight dusting. But if once fairly overtaken, it is woe betide him; for surrounded and half blinded with a dozen or a score of well-plied caps slashing about his face, his journey becomes a long and painful one, and it is no wonder that he should be unwilling to leave the temporary shelter of the den. There were fifteen players on this occasion, and it was not long before one clumsy-footed lad was foxed. Trying to show off by hopping down the line at a greater pace than the other players, he lost command of his

movements, and hopped on to, instead of over, one of the caps. He was partly on the run when he thus came to grief, and without pausing, made right away, with a clear start. But unfortunately for himself, he was not one of the fleet of foot; and before he had got thirty yards he was caught by the pack, and the pillaring began in grand style, and was vigorously kept up to the den, amid a string of such cries from the victim as, "Now then, Jones, you're hitting with the peak." "I'll warm you when I get loose!" "Oh, blow it, lads, give us a chance; don't get before me!" "Oh, none of that, Tommy Welsh, you're hitting me in the eyes on purpose!" "That's you, Mr. Butcher; you've got something hard in your cap, I can tell; none of that, you know!"

We had finished pillaring this one, and were in active pursuit of another, when the bell rang for forming classes, and our game was broken up. I entered school flushed and excited, but feeling much more comfortable in my mind than

I had done on the previous day; and now, instead of looking forward to the play-time with horror, I awaited it with impatience, for was I not to take part in the great battle which it was to witness?

At the first sound of the bell I made the best of my way into the playground, where I found many of those who were going to fight their battles o'er again already actively engaged in forming sides. I was met at the bottom of the steps that led into the playground by Billy Butcher, Mickey Bryan, and another boy named Jemmy Edwards, but who both in school and out was invariably called Dick Turpin.

"Hullo, Johnny, here you are!" shouted Mickey; "I didn't know you was a friend of Butcher's, or I wouldn't have plagued you. Come along. You're French, you know, and we're going to be your horses. Billy's going to be bearer, and we'll be front horses."

Saying this, he and Turpin ranged themselves side by side and threw their arms over each

others shoulders, and Billy putting his head between them just above their hips, and placing his arms round their waists so as to make a back, called to me to jump up. As soon as I was seated away we went at a gallop, and took up our position in Napoleon Reeves' heavy horse, the forces consisting entirely of cavalry.

The order of battle was the same on both sides. Each army was drawn up in three lines, the front consisting of about twenty heavy or three-horse cavalry, and the second and rear ranks of about the same number of light or single horse, each. The armies, headed by their respective commanders on foot, faced each other at a distance of about forty yards, and everything being in readiness, Long-legged John, as the Duke of Wellington, gave the command, "Advance," and, headed by their tall general, the whole British army commenced to move down upon us at a walking pace. Seeing this, Napoleon Reeves, coming in front of his troops, briefly addressed them thus—

“When I give the command ‘Advance,’ all advance. But when I give the word to charge, only the front rank will charge, the other two immediately halting. Now, advance !”

We moved forward at a walk, and were speedily within about twenty yards of the approaching enemy, and then the opposing commanders simultaneously gave the word to charge, and away we of the front rank of the French galloped to meet the charge of the whole British army. Some of our number, I fancy, hardly liked the odds, but there was no time for hesitation, and on we dashed to join in the shock of battle. When fairly engaged with the enemy we saw the superior generalship which our commander had displayed in only detaching his front rank to encounter the first onset of the foe. Though we had to encounter the charge of the whole of their force, massed as they were only their front rank could at once act effectively against us ; and the efforts of this rank were for a time greatly impeded by those behind strug-

gling to get forward. The shock of meeting sent our rank staggering back, but most of us having at the moment of contact grappled with a foe, we, by continuing the backward movement, when we saw that they were being borne unwillingly forward by the weight of their rear ranks, were enabled to drag down more than half of the enemy's heavy cavalry, while our own line was as yet almost unbroken. Clearing themselves of the fallen enemy, my horses dashed with me at one of our three-horse foes, who having freed himself from the ruck, calmly awaited our onset. Steeds and riders fiercely grappled, and in an instant I felt myself half choked, and being dragged over the shoulders of my leading horses, and was just giving myself up for lost when the fastening of my collar suddenly gave way. This caused my enemy to fall backward a little, and rapidly following up this advantage, I got a grip of him that made me master of the situation, and with the skilful aid of my leaders bore him and his horses to the ground. While

we were still hurrahing over this personal triumph, I was seized by the hair of the head, and nearly dragged from my seat sideways by one of the enemy's light cavalry; but my ready leaders swinging round when they felt my convulsive grasp on their shoulders swept the attacking horse and rider to the ground, the latter, however, taking a handful of my hair with him as he went down. The pain attending this performance was happily almost instantly forgotten in the excitement of defending myself from the simultaneous attack of three more of the British light horse. My well-trained steeds turned round and round as rapidly as they could, trying to keep the foemen in front, but they were too nimble for us, and I soon found myself charged on both sides, when my own strength had to be exerted at a disadvantage, and my leading horses could lend me little aid. Under these circumstances I was getting very severely mauled, and had parted with another handful or two of my hair, when our general gave the

word to our second rank to charge, and they dashed into the fight. Some of them rode at the two who were pressing me on the right, and drove them off; and relieved from their attack, I swept round, and soon sent the remaining one to earth. The charge of our second rank had completed the defeat of the already shattered British front, and the British general, advancing into the fight, gave the command, "You of the front rank, follow me to re-form!" Those who had composed that rank followed on foot out of the thick of the fight, which now became pretty general and very exciting. Once as I was dashing up to the assistance of a comrade who was attacked by odds, I was drawn bodily off my horse by one of the enemy who was rushing in the opposite direction, and was being dragged away captive, when my capturer, being in his turn attacked, was compelled to loose me, and I was enabled to remount in time to make a diversion in favour of my comrade just as he was on the point of

succumbing to the superior number of the enemy. Another time my bearing horse was brought to his knees, and twice we were thrown to the ground a confused mass. But my horses always clung together, and struggled to their feet, so that I was able to remount; and after each overthrow we arose, Antæus-like—to use the stock simile—refreshed by contact with our mother earth.

When the Duke of Wellington had nearly re-formed his heavy cavalry, our general charged them with his last rank, again throwing them into disorder, and then wheeling round, joined in the general attack on the light division of the British, who, now outnumbered and charged in front and rear, were fairly broken, and began to retreat.

“Keep them on the run, you of the second and third ranks,” shouted our commander; “you of the first rank follow me,” and, galloping after him, we made a brilliant charge on the enemy’s again partially re-formed heavy cavalry,

and once more, and finally, threw them into disorder. We then wheeled round on the main body, who had begun to rally again, broke them, and keeping them on the retreat until they were driven over the line from which they had started, completed our victory, and reversed history.

Having let off the superfluous triumphal steam by a salvo of cheers, we formed four deep, and, accompanied by such of our late antagonists as were in a position to remount, and a large number of non-combatants mounted and on foot, marched round the ground singing, "See, the conquering hero comes," and a grandly simple couplet of triumph always sung by the victorious party on these occasions, which runs thus :—

"We've won the battle, the battle of Waterloo;
We've won the battle, the battle of Waterloo!"

The triumphal march past being finished, we were re-formed into lines to listen to the customary congratulatory and commendatory address of

our great general; which address, as delivered by Napoleon Reeves, was—although we were not aware of it at the time—a fine piece of burlesque acting. At the conclusion of the speech another volley of cheers was given, and then we received the command to disperse, and we of the *grande armée* proceeded to arrange our disordered dress and look over our flagged field of Waterloo for buttons, buckles, collars, caps, scarves, and other articles lost, and scarcely missed in the heat of battle.

We had time to calm down a little before we were summoned into school again, but I could see by the light of battle that flushed the cheeks and gleamed from the eyes of my comrades, that they shared the feeling of elation and excitement which I still experienced. It was this feeling which caused us to pass to our respective places with a jaunty, bounding step, look with smiling defiance in the face of Ashplant the Terrible, who stood scowling in the doorway, and to exchange triumphant looks and wreathed smiles

—which, being interpreted, signified “we are the boys for them”—with any *bon comorado* whose victory-gleaming and sympathetic eye we happened to catch at any time during the remainder of the afternoon.

Our concluding lesson for the day was a singing one, which, in company with another class assembled in one of the class-rooms, we received from Ashplant. The first part of the lesson consisted in our singing the scale and beating time with our hands. From this we proceeded to singing a number of such songs as “Whither shall I follow,” and “A boat, a boat unto the ferry,” and then in chanting parts of the Church service. Just as this last part of the lesson was about to commence, Dick Turpin, who was seated on my right, and next to whom were his friends, Messrs. Butcher and Bryan, whispered to me, “Just you listen to what *we* sing.” When the chanting commenced I did listen, and in a short time made out that this worthy trio, although singing the proper tune, were substitut-

ing for the right words a sort of doggerel war chant of their own composition, which ran something in this strain :—

“ Old cocky handy Ashplant, hi, ho !
I should like to punch your big, ugly head, I know !
Shut up that big mouth of yours, hi, ho !
Or else it'll be shut up for you, I know !”

The excitement created by the battle in the playground had not quite died out by four o'clock, and under the influence of its smouldering remains we rushed out, stamping and shouting in a most uproarious manner, utterly regardless of the outraged and incensed Ashplant, who dashed into our midst, roaring out “ Silence !” and slashing about him in all directions with his ever-ready cane, a proceeding which elicited sharp yells from those on whom the random cuts descended, and those parliamentary sounds, “ Laughter,” and cries of “ Oh ! oh !” from the others.

Outside I was met by Bryan and Butcher, who were attended by “ troops of friends,” who

were going to accompany them on their way home lest they should be attacked by those whose marbles they had snacked in the dinner-time. When a sufficient body-guard had been marshalled, we set off homeward, making afternoon hideous to the quiet inhabitants of the streets through which we passed by whooping and rattling on area railings as we went along. Those whom Mickey had despoiled made no sign, but Butcher's victims and a number of their friends were waiting for him; but our party being the strongest, we charged and chased them, and then went on our victorious way rejoicing, and assuring each other that it was no use of any other lot trying to tackle us, and that we were the boys.

"Well, Johnny, my dear," said my mother, meeting me at the door, "and how did you get on amongst them to-day?"

"Oh, fine!" I burst out enthusiastically. "It was because I didn't know 'em yesterday that they got on to me. That Mickey Bryan, as I said was a bad 'un, is a regular stunner,

and so is Billy Butcher, as lives in our street ; he knows me, and it was him that put me right with the others ; and we had the battle of Waterloo, and all sorts of games. It was stunning."

"Well, I don't know about stunning," said my mother. "You look to me as if you'd been almost pulled to pieces. Look what a state your clothes are in. Where is your collar?"

"In my pocket," I answered. "It fell off."

"Oh ! it *fell* off, did it ? and I suppose them two buttons fell off, too, drat you. I shall never have my needle out of my hand with you now. I told your father how it would be, sending you to that school. I knew you'd soon be one of the gang, and one of the most audacious of them, too, if you're not watched. You always was inclined that way, and what's bred in the bone 'll come out in the flesh ; but whether or not, you musn't get coming home with your clothes all torn off your back, or it'll be worse for you."

I was rather put out at this reception, but I

soon recovered my spirits, for my father received my report very favourably ; and later in the evening, when I recounted the story of Waterloo and my own achievements therein, my mother considerably modified her opinions. When matters were explained to her in detail, she expressed herself to the effect that if for Johnny not to do as the rest of the boys would cause him to be set down as a softy, she would rather he came home with his clothes ripped every day than that he shouldn't do like the rest.

At play-time the next morning I joined my three friends in the playground, and proceeded with them to join in the game of horse-racing.

"Let's look at your shoes," said Turpin, when it had been arranged that I was to have the first mount.

"What for?" I asked.

"What for?" said he ; "why, to fix your spurs, to be sure ;" and drawing some pins from his mouth, he proceeded to fix the heads of a couple of them between the welts and heels of

my shoes ; "and here's your whip," he said, producing a narrow strip of stiffish leather from his pocket, "and don't you be afraid to lay on as long as there's a chance of winning."

Thus equipped, I mounted, and, on getting the signal from the starter, away we went at full gallop, and after a close and severe race throughout the distance, I came in an excellent second in a field of ten, though my horses somewhat indignantly declared that had I whipped and spurred as I ought to have done we must have won. When we had cantered back to the starting-place, I dismounted, and took Mickey Bryan's place as one of the front horses, he taking the place of bearer, while Butcher, who had been my bearing horse, took the mount. In this way we changed round, each one riding in his turn ; and, upon the whole, we were tolerably successful, as we won once, ran one dead heat, and were placed several times.

In the afternoon Butcher proposed that we should play prison bars, but to this Mickey

Bryan somewhat contemptuously objected, saying that them soft sort of games were well enough now and again, but that games in which those who didn't look sharp would get warmed were the games for him.

Butcher, thinking that he was accused, by implication, of entertaining a partiality for soft games, promptly replied that he didn't care what they played at; one game was the same to him as another.

"Very well, then," said Mickey, "let us play at 'Buggy-my-bear.'"

This was instantly agreed to, and away he went to find a number of others to join us in that game.

Buggy-my-bear is played by one of the players, who is called "Buggy" going on all-fours, holding in his hand one end of a string of three or four yards in length, the other end being held in the left hand of another boy, chosen by the bear to be his keeper, and who, carrying a knotted handkerchief in his right hand, walks

round the bear in the circle of the tether, and opens the game by repeating, in a sing-song tone, a piece of rhymed prose doggerel, which runs thus:—" Buggy-my-bear, touch my bear, them as dare, before I count ten—two, four, six, eight, ten, go the rig again." As soon as the keeper has said the word ten, the other players, who, armed with knotted scarves and handkerchiefs, stand round the bear, are at liberty to lay on Buggy, subject to the hazard of being themselves hit by the keeper's knot, in which case the party struck has to take Buggy's place. If it was getting very hot for the bear, his keeper could at any period of the game give him a temporary respite by calling out, " Bargs for the bear," when the game ceased till he gave the signal for its resumption by again repeating the opening rhyme. The length of time that a bear would be down, and the amount of punishment he was likely to receive, depended in a great measure upon the skill and activity of his keeper; and as the party of about a dozen which, in less than a

minute, Mickey Bryan had assembled, were about to cast lots to decide who should go down first, Mickey whispered to me,—

“If you get down, take me for keeper.”

The lot—which in the hands of a calculating boy would have been a certainty—was decided by one of the party repeating, touching a player at each word as he did so,

“Hickety, pickety, my black hen,
She lays eggs for gentlemen;
Sometimes one, sometimes ten,
Hickety, pickety my black hen;”

the lot falling on the one to whose turn the last word came. The boy who had to go down on this occasion asked Mickey Bryan to be his keeper, but he—as he was allowed by the laws of the game to do—declined, and the unhappy bear had to choose a more willing but less skilful guardian. The last word of the opening rhyme was scarcely spoken when one of the players dashed in and got a blow on the back of the bear, the mere sound of which made me shiver.

The keeper made a dash at this bold sharpshooter, and then the whole body of the players rushed in from the opposite side, and there immediately followed the report of a shower of blows that gave me a creeping down the back. The keeper made a run at the ruck, but following up one portion of them, those who had retreated in the opposite direction got in again, and he was compelled to run back to drive them off, and then those whom he had been previously chasing got their turn. Becoming confused by the rapidity of these attacks, he called, "Bargs for the bear," and so gave Buggy a brief respite, and an opportunity to rub his back, a soothing operation that he had been afraid of performing before, lest he should catch it on his hands. After a short pause, the word was given to resume play, and about half a dozen smart singles were quickly scored on the back of poor Buggy. Then came another general rush, and another shower of blows, which, happily for the bear, proved to be the last, for the players in retreating

got into each other's way, and the keeper was enabled to reach one of them with his knot.

The released Buggy got up, rubbing his back, and looking very rueful; but presently he drew his knotted scarf from his pocket, and putting an additional round to and tightening the knot, stood ready for action, muttering that now it was *his* turn to perform. The second bear got off with comparatively little punishment, the next who had to go down being my friend Dick Turpin, on whose behalf Mickey Bryan undertook the office of keeper. Dick was down a considerable length of time, but he was very little hit, for Mickey, being noted for his activity as a keeper, the players were remarkably cautious about approaching bears under his charge.

The way in which the bears caught it had been a caution to me, and though I had appeared to join very enthusiastically in the charges on Buggy, I had been very careful not to go near enough to hit him or to get hit by his keeper. But excitement is catching, and I soon began to warm

with the play; and the boy whom Mickey brought down to take Turpin's place being none other than the one who had, on the previous day, attempted to obtain possession of the contents of my pocket by way of consideration for "leaving me alone," I determined to have a hit at him at all hazards.

"What sort of a keeper is that he's got?" I asked of Mickey, when he and Turpin joined us again.

"O, he aint up to much," he replied; "but you must mind your eye for all that, or you'll be getting down."

"O, I'll mind," I said; and joining in the rush at the bear which at that instant took place, landed a fair hit, and got safely away. I was equally successful in two other rushes; and then I got home three swinging singles in less than as many minutes. Emboldened by the impunity with which I had been able to perform these feats, I again, heedless of the warning cry that broke from Mickey Bryan as he saw my

action, dashed at the bear single-handed, and was instantly "caught on the hop" by the keeper, who had this time laid wait for me.

The moment I was struck, the excitement that had led me on to my fate died out, and the horror of having to go down came full upon me, sending a cold shiver through my frame. The fear of being called a softy, however, speedily produced a partial reaction, and I managed to screw up my courage to the point of forcing a smile, and asking Mickey, in a tone of affected don't-careishness, to be my keeper. He at once accepted the office, and as he placed the string in my hand, whispered, "Be hard, and keep your head well down. I'll get you up as soon as ever I can."

Pocketing my scarf, I knelt, and acting on Mickey's advice, kept my head well under. I expected to feel the cut of the knots the instant the last word of the rhyme was spoken, and I held my breath, and contracted the muscles of my back in fearful anticipation of the coming

event. But no blow came, and for a couple of minutes, which seemed to me to be at least half an hour, no one was able to get within the guard of the vigilant Mickey. I was beginning to think that surely the blows could hardly be worse to bear than this terrible state of suspense, when I heard the quick patter of feet, and at the same moment received the first hit, which, being a stinger, at once resolved my doubts, and decided me in favour of the suspense as being the least of the two evils. The ball being now opened, two other players followed in rapid succession, and each got well home on my back, my keeper, who was on guard on the side opposite to that from which they charged, making no attempt to follow them. Seeing this, and suffering under the smart of the blows, I cast a reproachful glance upon Mickey, in answer to which, he came close to me, and said, in a low tone, "Be hard, Johnny; keep on never heeding. I'll have 'em on the hop next time; see if I don't." As he walked away, one of the

players came in at me, and Mickey, making a run at him, a rush of the other players took place from the opposite side. But Mickey's run had merely been a draw, and having kept his movements well under control, he leaped suddenly back, and slinging out his knot, hit the leader of the rush before he could attempt to retreat.

I was thus released very lightly and had not to go down again; but on thinking the matter over when we were in school, I came to the conclusion that Mickey Brian's taste in games was scarcely a pleasant one, and secretly resolved that when I should know my way about a little better I would choose some of the milder games, notwithstanding Mickey's contemptuous condemnation of them as being soft. But long before I was in a position to pick and choose with whom and at what I would play, I had got over this early repugnance to games involving physical suffering, and become as great an admirer and practiser of them as Bryan himself. I soon found, as it will be

invariably found among school-boys, that the best and pluckiest boys were the ones most attached to these abstractly cruel games. That this should be so, that really kind-hearted and generous-minded boys, boys who would share their dinner with a starving street cur, or cheerfully give away their highly-treasured, many-bladed knife as a bribe to get a companion out of a scrape; who would at any moment take off their jackets in defence of a smaller friend, or stand to be thrashed into insensibility rather than "snitch" of a school-mate, should be the ones most attached to these games, may at first appear strange. But when it is considered that this partiality arises from that disregard of danger and the spirit of endurance and emulation that are fairly regarded as forming part of the natural and national character of Englishmen, the apparent contradiction is explained. When that is considered, it is easy to conceive how boys with no trait of cruelty in their dispositions may prefer

games which to a grown-up person may seem to be simply pieces of wanton cruelty, and in the pursuit of such games bear with stoical indifference a degree of pain that, if inflicted by way of correction or by accident, would set them writhing and howling.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HOLLOW—LONG-TAILED PONY—NEW CLOTHES—SUNDAY-SCHOOL—A STARTLING ACCIDENT IN CHURCH.



IN schools of the class of the Borough school of Dockington there is no attendance on Saturday, and those pupils of such schools who are companions and playmates out of doors as well as in school, arrange the time and place of their Saturday meeting while going home from school on the Friday afternoon. In pursuance of that plan I arranged with Butcher and Bryan and their set to meet them at ten o'clock on Saturday morning in "the Hollow," a piece of waste land used as a playground by the boys of the neighbourhood. I reached the trysting place exactly at the time appointed, but my friends did not arrive till near an hour after-

wards, having been unavoidably delayed, Mickey Bryan explained, by a long and unsuccessful hunt after a large rat which they had seen emerge from an open drain and run under a stack of timber near some houses in the course of building.

When Mickey, assisted by his companions as a sort of chorus, had concluded his graphic and detailed description of the hunt, Dick Turpin, with a wink at his companions which I caught but unfortunately did not understand the significance of, proposed that we should play "Long-tailed pony." This proposition was unanimously agreed to, and Turpin advancing to me and pulling a roll of twine from his pocket said, "you be my pony first, Johnny, and then I'll be yours."

"Very well," I said, not caring about confessing that I did not exactly know how long-tailed pony was played, and he immediately proceeded to tie the ends of the string round my arms close to the shoulder.

Several others had in the meantime been simi-

larly harnessed, and our respective drivers taking their reins in hand, and giving us a jerk as the signal for starting, away we went round the Hollow.

"Now, we'll take a turn down the street and back again, and then I'll be the pony," said Turpin, when we had been twice round the Hollow; and steering me to the left, we were soon in the street.

"Wo-oo!" cried my driver, pulling me up short when we had galloped about a hundred yards along the flags at top speed. "Wind, ho!" he gasped, when we had come to a stop; "we must have a rest after that." After drawing a deep breath, he went on, giving me a half turn, so as to bring my back to the houses as he spoke; "You must suppose as if I was going to put you into the stable, and you must hold your head up, and look straight before you, and prance, and be high-spirited like, and back slowly when I pull the reins."

In obedience to these commands, I was

backing and prancing, and was in the midst of a high-spirited curvette, when I was startled by a thundering ran-tan close behind me. Jumping round at this sound, I made the appalling discovery that I was tied fast to the door-handle of a house inhabited by a notorious old shrew, whom the children in the street were in the habit of annoying whenever she appeared out of doors, and who amply returned the compliment by fiercely mauling any of her juvenile foes that she could contrive to lay hold of. Turpin had run away as soon as he had given the peal on the knocker, and on looking despairingly around me, I beheld him and his companions peeping from a court on the opposite side of the street, and grinning and dancing with delight at the prospect of the sport that they were going to witness. I was about to shout out an appeal to them, when I was suddenly and violently jerked backwards; and on looking at the door, I saw it partially opened, and the inflamed face and fiercely-sparkling eyes of the old woman

of the house glaring in the aperture. Impelled by this horror-inspiring apparition, I made a dash forward, and succeeded in closing the door, and then commenced a terrific struggle for the mastery of it. My foe, enraged almost to madness, succeeded in getting it partially opened about half-a-dozen times, and I, struggling with the strength that comes of fear and despair, as often succeeded in closing it again before she could force herself out, the last time giving her a squeeze that made her roar. After this incident she ceased her efforts to open the door, and I began to think that I would now escape without further injury, as I could see by the movements and looks of my companions that they were of opinion that the joke had gone far enough. But at the instant that they were about to cross the road, the old woman, who probably calmed by the squeeze she had undergone, had suddenly remembered that there was another mode of exit from her house, rushed up the cellar steps, and swooping down upon me,

twisted her one hand in my hair, and with the other cuffed my ears till I was dizzy. Seeing me thus helpless in the hands of the infuriated enemy, my companions ran to my rescue. Bryan cut the reins, and Butcher dragged me from the grasp of my foe, while Dick Turpin, who, in trying to pull the virago off me, had nearly torn the skirt from the body of her dress, informed her with many dire threats, that she would be paid out for this, and no mistake about it. I was led back to the Hollow, my companions looking very penitent, and vicing with each other in assuring me that it was only meant for a lark, and that they had no idea that the old pig, as Butcher called my assailant, would have got on to me in the way she had.

As I was a great deal more frightened than hurt, my equanimity of mind was soon restored, and knowing by this time that the best plan was to take these matters in good part, I, in my turn, assured them that it was all right, and that I knew they had not meant me any harm ;

and this part of the affair being settled, we began to talk vengeance against old mother Hopwood.

"We'll pay her off somehow or other any way," said Turpin, when several schemes of revenge had been discussed without any being definitely decided upon ; "only you wait, Johnny, till the dark nights come, and then see what a life we'll lead her ; that's all."

Revenge for my wrongs being thus postponed, the long-tailed poney adventure was allowed to drop, and a game of duckstone was proposed and agreed to. This game lasted until dinner-time, and to me it seemed to be in the nature of a piece of retribution when, in the course of it, Dick Turpin received a knock on the shin that made him limp for a week afterwards.

On assembling in the Hollow again after dinner, marbles became the order of the day, and by tea-time Billy Butcher, who had a remarkable run of luck, had "skinned" us all. When he had cleared out the last of our party, he gave us back three marbles each to set us up again,

but refused to renew play with us himself; for like the majority of gamblers, Billy was something of a fatalist, and while he regarded snacked marbles as lucky, he considered it unlucky to go on playing with those whom you had skinned and set up again. After tea we unfortunates who had been skinned, having no marbles worth playing for, proceeded to play three holes for "knucklers," and never having played at the game before, I came in for such a share of the knucklers that when we gave up play at dusk the backs of my hands appeared to me to have become two lumps of pain. Butcher, in the meantime, more fortunate than Alexander, had found more worlds to conquer. He had joined a set notorious for their high play, and his run of luck continuing, had broke several of them, and won from them all. And now, when play was stopped by the approaching darkness, his marble bag and all his pockets were overflowing with his winnings, some portions of which he had won twice over, as he had been selling ha'porths

half as large again as those of the shops to some of those whom he had skinned, and had bartered marbles for twine, coloured glass, and the brass anchor buttons which one desperate gamester had cut off his jacket, the folds of which garment he was now trying in vain to so arrange as to conceal the loss. Followed by an envious and yet admiring crowd of the skinned, Billy, carrying with him a larger amount of winnings than had ever been before won by a single player in one day's play within the memory of the oldest frequenter of the Hollow, walked home in triumph, stray marbles dropping from his overflowing pockets, and being scrambled for in the deepening twilight by us unlucky creatures. And so, pausing occasionally to offer fifteen stonies for a halfpenny, he went on his conquering way rejoicing, happily unconscious that those marbles were to be the means of bringing dire trouble upon him, and that it would have been far better for him had he been one of the skinned, instead of the heavy winner he was.

Amid all the joy, sorrow, and excitement of the week, I often thought of the new suit for which I had been measured, and which was to replace, as a Sunday one, that which I now wore on week days. A new Sunday suit was a thing to be looked forward to and thought about even under ordinary circumstances, but this was something more than a new suit pure and simple. It was my first suit of jacket and trousers proper, of a jacket that could be worn open, so as to display the "man's" waistcoat and shirt front, and trousers secured by braces, and with pockets in which I could carry my hands. It was, as it were, the official robe of my formal and accredited installation into the ranks of boyhood, on putting on which it was understood I should for ever put away *childish* things. And as I tried to picture myself in this all-important suit, which was to be the outward and visible sign of my having entered upon the second of the seven ages of man, and thought of the dignity that it was to confer upon me, I

sternly resolved that when once inducted into it, I would give the cut direct to some of my tunic'd friends who were still at school with Mrs. Wilson, and to whom I had already begun to show the cold shoulder, on being admitted into the brotherhood presided over by Messrs. Bryan and Butcher.

The suit was to have been brought home on the Friday, but as it did not arrive at the stipulated time my mother called at the tailor's residence on the Saturday afternoon to inquire into the cause of the delay, and then ascertained that it arose from the tailor's having gone off on the spree on the previous Wednesday. But as he had been "spent out" on the Friday, had pawned his coat on the Saturday morning, and had nothing else to pawn, and was denied credit by the publicans of the neighbourhood, by whom it appeared he was much better known than respected, he would be certain, his wife said, to finish the suit early in the following week. In consequence of these proceedings upon the

part of the spreeing tailor, I was, much against my will and despite earnest remonstrance, packed off to Sunday school in my every-day clothes.

"It don't matter me not going for one Sunday," I urged; "and what's the good of me going only to be made game of. I know they'll all be on to me, because when they said I had got my Sunday clothes on, I told them I hadn't, and that I would have a new suit on Sunday, and now they'll say I've been telling lies, and make all sorts of fun of me."

In reply to these objections, my mother began to explain that the clothes I had on had only been worn for every-day a week; that they were none the worse, and were probably a good deal better than those of many of my school-mates; that I might think myself lucky if I always got as good, and so forth. But my father cut the matter short by sternly calling out that I must go whether or not, and that I had better be off pretty sharp, or he would

help me; whereupon my mother, slipping a penny into my hand, and whispering, "It's only for this once, Johnny, you know," pushed me out through the door.

When about half way to school I was overtaken by Mickey Bryan and a number of others, and Mickey at once opened fire, by calling out, "Oh, my! lads, look here; they ain't my Sunday clothes; I shall have a new suit on Sunday. Oh, yes; so I suppose; over the left though. I don't get bragging about my clothes. Oh, no; not at all." This speech, jerked out as he danced round me, and posed me so as to give his companions various views of my figure, was received with derisive cheers, as were also my attempts to explain the matter, and my efforts to escape from the grasp of my tormentor, and failing that, to kick his shins. This performance would probably only have been the commencement of the chaffing and mauling that I would have got, in consequence of my unhappy bragging, but that fortunately, in my struggle with Mickey, the

penny that my mother had given me was shaken out of the pocket of my tunic.

"Oh, here's a penny," cried one of the gang, picking it up.

"You give that here," I cried out; "it's mine."

"Is it though?" said the boy, spinning the penny in the air and catching it again; "how do you know now?"

"I know very well," I said; "my mother gave it me to spend."

This announcement, blurted out in a passion, and with no ulterior design, had a decided and immediate effect upon my persecutors. They instantly assumed a sympathetic and respectful demeanor, and turning upon the one of their number who had picked up the penny, cried out in chorus, and in a deeply injured tone, "Oh, come now, Davies, none of that, you know; a bit of a lark is all very well, but when it comes to wanting to keep his money, you know——" And unable to find words sufficiently powerful to convey an adequate idea

of the terrible state at which things had arrived when it came to trying to keep my penny, they left it to my imagination, and the conscience of Davies, to picture it to ourselves ; and Davies, appalled by such a burst of virtuous indignation, at once handed back the penny, which it was plainly evident he had never for a moment dreamt of keeping.

"We were only joking, you know," said Mickey, taking my arm when my penny had been restored to me ; "and you don't care for that, do you, Johnny?"

"I don't mind a joke," I answered, "but at the same time I don't like to be pulled about."

"Oh, never mind," said Mickey ; "it was only a bit of fun," and then seeing that I was pacified, he abruptly exclaimed, as if the matter had just that instant occurred to him, "Oh, I say, Johnny, are you going to spend that penny?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Well, you know, you'll catch it if you're caught running out of the ranks as we march to

church; so don't you think you'd better spend it now?"

Not wishing to "catch it," I replied, after a moment's consideration, that I thought I better had; and so, on coming to the next sweetstuff shop, I bought an ounce of "Mixtures," and having given a share of them to my companions, concord was fully restored among us; even Davies being forgiven, while I expressed the firmest and friendliest belief in the repeated assurances of Mickey and his friends that they had only been larking, and that they knew very well that I was going to have a new suit, or I would not have said so.

We entered the play-ground just as the bell ceased ringing, and immediately fell into our classes, which were marched into school and formed in their usual places. The teaching of the cane was suspended on Sundays, the rules of the school forbidding the administration of corporal punishment on that day. The names and crimes of offenders were, however, taken down,

in order that their cases might be adjudicated upon, and their due meed of punishment awarded and administered to them on the following day. But my schoolmates, it was evident, were of opinion that

“Enough is the present tense of *cane*,”

and so took no heed for the morrow; for, though Ashplant was moving about in all directions, keeping a vigilant look-out, and frequently inscribing names in his black list, there was throughout the school a constant buzz of conversation, and much of the reading of the Scripture lesson was inarticulate, owing to the mouths of the readers being filled with toffee. About a quarter past ten we were taken into the playground and formed two abreast, and then set out on our march to church, which was about half a mile distant. During the march Ashplant and the teachers were on the alert to prevent any of the scholars from leaving the ranks, but neither this watchfulness nor the certainty of being thrashed on the following morning, should they

be captured in the act of running the blockade, was sufficient to deter some of the more daring and sweetstuff-loving of the boys from darting into the open confectioners' shops on our line of march; and as the young gentleman with whom I was linked was one of the venturesome few, I had thus early an opportunity of learning the mode of carrying out this most useful and frequently-practised branch of toffee smuggling.

"I want to get a ha'porth of sweets," said my companion soon after we had started, "will you tell if I run out of the rank?"

I instantly answered that I would not; but this prompt and unconditional acquiescence only seemed to excite suspicion in the mind of my companion, for, regarding me with a distrustful glance, he replied—

"Oh, yes, so you tell *me*, but will you say that's wet to it?"

I was at first inclined to resent the doubt thus cast upon my honour, but seeing that he would have taken such an attempt as "confirmation

strong” of the justice of his suspicions, I quietly took the suggested cabalistic oath, which was performed thus:—I wetted the point of the forefinger of my right hand, and showing it to my unbelieving classmate, asked, “Is that wet?” On receiving his reply in the affirmative, I dried the finger, and then showing it to him again, asked, “Is that dry?” and being again answered in the affirmative, I drew the finger across my throat, saying, as I did so, “Cut my throat if I tell a lie.”

Among the boys of our school this was considered the most terribly binding of all incantatory forms of swearing, and was popularly supposed to give the person before whom the oath was taken a legal right to cut the throat of the swearer should the latter prove false. And having, by administering it, secured himself from any danger of my “snitching,” my smuggling friend availed himself of the opportunity of Ashplant going to the front to see the procession over a crossing, to dart into a sweetstuff shop, from

which he speedily and safely returned with a paper of mixtures, of which he gave me a pretty liberal share, for, as he explained, he always liked to do what was right, and it was only to provide against my attempting to extort an unfair whack of the sweets by threatening "to tell" that he had sworn me to secrecy in the impressive manner described above.

The part of the church assigned to the children of the Borough schools was an upper gallery, that had been formed by railing off a portion of what had originally been the organ loft, and here upon our arrival about a quarter to eleven we were duly installed, and despite Ashplant's angry hushes and liberal putting down of names, kept up a most irreverent whispering and sniggering until the service commenced. Most of the boys were well acquainted with the prayer book, and gave all the responses with great clearness and regularity, and joined in the singing with very pleasing effect. But children who had already had a couple of hours' religious exercise

in school could not of course be expected to take an interest in a prosy, commonplace sermon; and soon after the text had been given out some of our number were asleep. Others whiled away the time by reading the historical parts of the Bible, and some, while pretending to do the same, read tale books which they held inside their Bibles; and though this latter was certainly a reprehensible proceeding, it would have been well for the credit of the school generally, and for Billy Butcher in particular, had it been the worst adopted as an antidote to the dulness of the sermon.

Butcher, not having had time to reckon his winnings on Saturday night, had, it appeared, brought his stock of marbles to church with the intention of counting and sorting them during sermon time. In a quarter of an hour after the text had been given out the congregation were comfortably settled, and even Ashplant had relaxed his vigilance, and with half-closed eyes leaned back in the corner of the pew from which

he kept watch and ward upon the boys. Availing himself of a state of things so suitable for his design, Billy placed his cap upon his knee, and softly began to count the marbles into it. For a time his evil work went on all well. He had counted the whole of the marbles, and was just about to begin to replace them in his bag, which was suspended round his neck and concealed under his jacket, when he was so startled by Ashplant suddenly facing round upon him that he let the cap fall from his knees. The cap went down with a loud crash, and the marbles tumbling out of it rolled rapidly down the inclined floor, and fell in a rattling shower into the lower gallery, from whence a lot of them went bouncing into the body of the church. Had it been a whiff of grapeshot instead of a bag of marbles that had been thus suddenly discharged among the congregation, the effect could scarcely have been more startling than that produced by the more harmless missiles. At the first crash the minister paused in his sermon, and all eyes

were directed to our gallery, and before the nature of the disturbance could be discovered the confusion and indecorum of the scene were heightened by an old lady in the lower gallery, on whom the first force of the shower descended, giving vent to a startled exclamation of "God bless my life!" and a gentleman in the body of the church, who had been awakened by the noise, and was evidently for the moment impressed with the idea that the upper part of the building was falling in, calling, "Look out!" When, from the marbles being scattered about the church, the true nature of the accident became apparent, some of the congregation sniggered audibly, while the more sedate portion frowned alike at the sniggerers and us. Ashplant was the first to recover from the inaction into which, in common with the rest of the congregation, he had been thrown by the surprise and horror occasioned by so unprecedented an occurrence. We were all so terrified by what had taken place, that for an instant he was at a loss as to who was the


culprit; but presently noticing Butcher's cap lying on the ground, he divined that it was that unfortunate youth, whom he had seized by the collar, and was dragging out of the church before the minister had sufficiently recovered to go on with his sermon.

When we got out of church Butcher's unlucky spill was of course the all-absorbing topic of conversation among us. Never had so disastrous an occurrence of the kind been known to take place before. Caps had occasionally fallen over the railings, and cases were cited of one boy having dropped a paper of peppermints, and another a prayer book, into the body of the church. Such cases as these could not, however, be classed in the same category as Butcher's offence, which stood alone in its unmitigated hideousness; and the question arose, what penalty would be inflicted upon such an offender. Some thought that the minister would take the matter in hand and have him sent to prison, and others that he would be turned out of the school; but

the more reflective gave it as their opinion that, as this was the first time that he had been in a scrape of this kind, he would get off with a good caning, but that his sin would probably be visited upon the general body, by causing the establishment of some such restrictive law as having to have our pockets searched before going into church. When near home Bryan, Turpin, and I were met by Butcher, who still looked pale and frightened, and inquired anxiously whether Ashplant had said anything. We informed him that he had not, and asked him what he intended to do. He replied, that he supposed he was in for it, and must face it out the best way he could, and that, at any rate, he would come to school that afternoon as he couldn't be touched then. He accordingly came to school, where he was the observed of all observers, being regarded with all the awe and interest attached to a being known to be doomed.

CHAPTER XII.

I GET MY NEW SUIT, WHICH, AS WILL BE SEEN, LEADS TO A FIGHT, IN WHICH I COME OFF VICTORIOUS—I ENCOUNTER A STREET BOY, WHO ADDS INSULT TO INJURY, BY FIRST STEALING MY BREAD AND THEN MAKING MY NOSE BLEED.—I “GET THE CANE.”

ONDAY morning was always a high carnival time with Ashplant. Mr. Mayfield was engaged in the committee-room receiving new pupils, so that the check imposed by his presence in the school-room was removed; more boys came late on that morning than on any other, and those down on the Sunday black list had to be punished. These circumstances, and the forced abstinence from the use of the cane on the previous day, caused our redoubtable second master to be in specially great flogging order on Monday, and for an hour after prayers on that

morning, there was always weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth among the boys. On the day following the spilling of the marbles, Ash-plant was in particularly high feather, even for a Monday, and having got his hand thoroughly in by disposing of the late comers and the minor Sunday cases, he fell upon Butcher, and flogged him as none but a brutal bully would have flogged a defenceless boy, and it was some days before Billy was himself again; so that out of the apparent good of his great success at marbles there came to him very considerable evil.

The drunken tailor having, from want of funds wherewith to carry on his spree, started to work again, my new suit was sent home on the Thursday; and the same evening I tried it on in the presence of Mickey Bryan and Billy Butcher, who, as well as my parents, assured me that I looked first-rate in it. Between the Thursday and Sunday my thoughts were all of my new clothes, on the glories of which I confidently dilated to a number of my school-mates. On

the Sunday morning I was up betimes, and having been arrayed in my new garments, set out for school, feeling immensely proud, and quite convinced that my mother had spoken no more than the truth when she assured me, as I was leaving the house, that I looked quite manly.

The first person I met was one of Mrs. Wilson's scholars, a boy about a year younger than myself, who on seeing me stopped, and in a tone of admiration exclaimed, "Why, Johnny, I scarcely knew you! You *do* look nice in a man's suit."

"Oh, do I?" I replied, with cold haughtiness. "Well, never *you* mind."

On reaching the play-ground, a number of the boys gathered round me to examine my clothes, and though most of them gave me a vigorous pinch on the leg while pretending to feel the quality of the cloth, they generally expressed admiration at my improved appearance. Among the most complimentary of these boys

was one named Morgan, who, after specially praising the cut and texture of my jacket, asked to be allowed to try it on. To this I readily consented, and pulling it off handed it to him. He drew it on, and immediately declared that it was just the thing, though I could see that it was much too tight for him; and fearing that he would burst it, I hastily requested him to take it off. This, however, he refused to do, and on my trying to lay hold of him he ran away, and while I was chasing him, he either accidentally or purposely fell, bursting and otherwise damaging my jacket in the fall. On seeing all the proud hopes in which I had fondly indulged in connexion with my new suit thus rudely blighted, I fell to crying, and was still sobbing bitterly when Butcher arrived upon the scene.

“Holloa, Johnny,” he said, laying his hand kindly upon my shoulder, “what’s the matter?”

As well as my sobbing would allow I told him.

“O! it’s you, is it, Mr. Morgan?” said Billy,

turning upon that worthy, who was standing by holding the torn jacket, and protesting that he couldn't help it, and had only been in fun.

"Well, you'll hear about it to-morrow, I can tell you," replied Billy, when some of the other boys as well as myself had assured him that Morgan had "done it on purpose." "Cheer up, don't cry, Johnny," he went on, turning to me again; "it ain't so very bad, and if we could only get it brushed and a stitch or two in it, it would do for to-day."

"If he'll come over to our house my mother'll do it up for him," said one of my class-mates, who lived just opposite the school.

"That's your sort, Cheshire," answered Billy, accepting the offer for me, and accordingly I was taken to the house, where Cheshire's mother, who expressed great sympathy for my misfortune, speedily made both my jacket and myself presentable, by brushing and sewing the former, and washing my tear-stained face.

The next day Billy made inquiries among those

who had witnessed the affair, and finding that their unanimous opinion was that Morgan had damaged my jacket intentionally, and from the generally envious motive that he did not like to see any one dressed better than himself, he called a sort of court of honour, consisting of himself, Mickey Bryan, Dick Turpin, and one or two others, to deliberate upon what was to be done. After due discussion, the court came to the conclusion that I must fight, and this decision Butcher communicated to me at dinner time.

“Oh, but he’s bigger than me,” I urged.

“Well, only a little bit,” answered Billy; “and I don’t think he’s any stronger, and it’s my opinion he’s mouse-hearted if he’s stuck to, and at any rate you must have a cut at him, win or lose, or if you don’t you’ll have everybody putting on you.”

Having thus settled that I was to fight, Billy proceeded to inform me that I must meet Morgan coming out of school, challenge him, and either make him fight or “give me the best,” and that

he and Bryan would second me and "see fair play."

The news that Johnny Robinson was going to challenge Dick Morgan was quietly circulated through the school during the afternoon, and on getting outside at four o'clock, I found a lot of the boys eagerly awaiting the expected fray. A few seconds after I had got out Morgan was seen approaching, and Butcher whispered to me, "Now then, Johnny, go on; no funking, mind."

Thus encouraged, and knowing that I was the observed of all observers, and that the present would be an important point in my school career, I walked boldly up to my foe, and touching him on the shoulder, said, "Now, Morgan, we'll have it out for you spoiling my jacket."

"I didn't do it on purpose," he answered, trying to push past me.

"O yes, you did," I said, emboldened by seeing him non-combatively inclined, "and you must fight me for it."

"I shan't fight anything about it," he replied.

"Then you must give me the best," I said.

"No, I won't," he answered.

"Then hit him, Johnny," called out Billy Butcher.

"O, he don't want to fight," I said.

"It don't matter," shouted Billy, "hit him, or I'll hit you."

"Ay, ay ! give him the cowardy blow, Johnny," shouted the others.

"Here goes then," I said, tapping my opponent lightly on the cheek with my open hand, whereupon my companions formed a circle by joining hands, and commenced the performance of a kind of war-dance, to which, as an accompanying chant, they sang—

"Cowardy, Cowardy custard,
Eat a pound of mustard."

This public and ceremonious administration of the "cowardy blow" ordeal left Morgan no alternative but to acknowledge himself a coward or fight, and thus forced to a decision, he chose the latter with a promptness that rather chilled me.

"Well, I *will* fight you now," he said, "and remember you've only yourself to blame for what you'll get."

"O, I'll chance that," I said, as I walked off with my backers and others of my inclining, towards the piece of vacant ground on which most of the school fights were brought off.

On reaching the ground, Morgan and I were speedily stripped, and delivered at the scratch. "Keep him out, he's all for throwing," was Butcher's advice to me; but this I was unable to do, for we had scarcely faced each other before Morgan rushed upon me, and getting my head under his arm, gave me a blow in the mouth which cut my lip, and then threw and fell upon me. He had unmistakably the best of this round, and was loudly cheered by his party, while mine were ominously silent. The second round was a mere repetition of the first, and at the end of it his friends were calling out, "You'll lick him easy, Dick;" to which Dick, with a triumphant smile, replied, "Well, it's his own fault; he *would* have it."

The third and fourth rounds were in much the same style as the first two had been, save that in the last we had a rather prolonged struggle for "the fall," of which, however, I ultimately got the worst. Feeling giddy from these repeated falls, and finding the tide going so steadily against me, I began to think of yielding to my fate, and giving my antagonist "the best."

"I'm afraid he's too much for me," I whispered to Butcher, as he and Bryan were taking me to my corner after the fourth round.

"Well, he's had the best of it so far," said Billy, to whom no idea of capitulation seemed as yet to have occurred; "but if you stick to him you may lick him yet. Do as I tell you; stand your ground and try to catch him as he comes in, and keep your head up so that he can't get it under his arm."

I tried to follow out his advice in the fifth round, and though I did not "land" the blow I aimed at my foe as he rushed at me, the in-fighting when we closed was more equal than it had

previously been, and at the end of the round my friends managed to get up a faint cheer. In the following round I again failed to hit him as he came in, but the in-fighting was again pretty equal, and Mickey Bryan expressed his opinion that it was still an open fight, by observing that there was "no cock's eye out yet." In the seventh round I at last managed to "prop" my opponent. As he came rushing at me, I hit straight out and caught him heavily on the nose, with the two-fold effect of bringing the blood freely from that organ, and effectually stopping his rush. And carrying out Butcher's advice to "go at him," while it was yet being expressed, I got his head under my arm, and pegged away at it till he got down. At the conclusion of this round it was the turn of my party to be jubilant, and they cheered and cried, "bravo Johnny," most lustily, and then Mickey began to dance and derisively exclaim "He'll lick him easily, will he? Just hold on a bit and you'll see which side the licking 'll be on!"

The next four or five rounds were of a very give-and-take order, but after that, Morgan, who seemed to lose spirit when he had no longer the lead, began to fall off. He still rushed in determinedly, but his rushes lacked the dash that characterized them at first, and I generally succeeded in propping him as he came in, and presently I began to have the best of the wrestling, which was his strong point, and so after a little more than half-an-hour's fighting, he "gave me the best," and we shook hands. My friends gave three cheers as a note of victory, and then hoisting me on their shoulders, marched off with me, triumphantly singing

"Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!
Johnny Robinson's won the day.
We wont go home till morning,
We wont go home till morning,
We wont go home till morning.
Till Dick Morgan runs away."

This victory over one who was "my own size" and something more, and the fact that I was now an accredited member of the Butcher-Bryan set, gave me a standing in the school;

and having thus successfully got through the "new boy" stage of it, I began to greatly enjoy my school life. I now considered myself thoroughly established, but on congratulating myself to that effect one day in the hearing of Mickey Bryan, he gravely informed me that I would not be free of the school until I had "had the cane." As this crowning feature of a complete initiation was the reverse of pleasant, I was not merely content to do without it, but did all in my power to avoid it, and so circumspect was my conduct, that I had been at the school for what was considered the surprisingly long period of six weeks before I fell into the clutches of Ashplant, an event that was at last brought about in this wise.

Sometimes, from breakfast being a little late, or my having to run on an errand, I would be pressed for time in the morning, and with the fear of being late before my eyes, I would, like other children under the same circumstances, take the better part of my breakfast in the shape

of a great slice of bread and butter, or bread and treacle, in my hand, and eat it on the road to school. Of this practice on the part of school-children the hungry young Arabs of Dockington were aware, and turned it to profitable account. They would secrete themselves in entries branching off thoroughfares leading to some large school, until a boy with a "piece" in his hand came in sight, when, uttering the cry of "snacks," they rushed from their lair, snatched the piece, and ran off. On several occasions I had suffered from these depredations, and being of a hungry disposition I felt very savagely disposed towards my despoilers. And one morning, when one of these brigands, a lad of about my own size, who had twice before snatched my pieces, swept down upon me and carried off a particularly large and toothsome slice of bread and syrup, I gave chase, determined to be avenged and "from the robber rend his prey." I speedily overtook my flying foe, and was reaching out my arm to lay hold of him, when he suddenly wheeled round,

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two cuts upon each hand, and sent me back to my class crying, and with my hands squeezed between my knees.

Having thus "had the cane," my initiation into "the ways of the school" was looked upon as complete, and I settled down as one of the ordinary rank and file among the scholars, having got rid of the awkward helplessness of the new boy, without as yet attaining any of that not altogether pleasant feature of "cockiness" which distinguished some of the older boys.

END OF VOL. I.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

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